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THE ROUA PASS;

OR,

ENGLISHMEN IN THE HIGHLANDS.

BY

ERICK MACKENZIE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THE ROUA PASS;

OR,

ENGLISHMEN IN THE HIGHLANDS.

CHAPTER I.

THE HIGHLAND SHEPHERD'S FATE.

The snow was so deep,
That his heart it grew weary,
And he sank down to sleep
In the moorland so dreary.

HOGG.

It gars the life-blood quicker run,
It fills the heart wi' glee,
It brings the rose tint to the cheek,
The sparkle to the e'e.

CURLER'S SONG.

WINTER set in at Glenbenrough with great severity in the month of January, just after Esmé and Ishbel, with their father, returned

from Strathshielie, where a large party had kept New Year with Highland honours and unabated spirit for nearly a fortnight after its entrance. They congratulated themselves on having arrived at home, for the snow-flakes began silently to fall so fast and thick, that twelve hours' delay would have made the road almost impassable. Snow fell almost uninterruptedly for a week, until the whole face of the country was wrapped in the white winding-sheet of nature's death-like sleep; and then hard frost set in: yet the air felt warmer than it had done for weeks, for the slight breeze that occasionally shook their snowy burthen from the trees, blew from the west.

Beautiful it was to stand at the open window and gaze upon the scene: the snow lay deep in a wide unstained expanse of glittering whiteness, far as the eye could reach, over hill and glen and forest; varied by shades and tints of diverse beauty, as the sun's rays gave a warm glow to the snowy waste, and cast long shadows of the trees. Groups of silvery-frosted

birch hung drooping their long-veiled heads like frozen brides, and serried ranks of stalwart pines reared their snowy crests in bold relief against a wintry sky of ethereal blue, without a flake or rack of cloud; while younger pines, crowding near, brightened the old brown neutral tints with foliage of dark green. The high peak of the rocks glittered like icy spears in the sunshine, and cast their forked shadows upon the lower jutting crags.

Death-like stillness reigned throughout; but it was the stillness of nature's repose—of the hybernation of the frost-bound earth; yet not without indications of the future awakening of vegetable life. There was none of the vivid colouring of summer to distract the eye: each object lay distinct in shape as if carved in marble, or clothed in a mantle of white; producing an impression of sublime tranquillity. The scenery looked loftier, the trees more massive and individualized; and, as the eye took in that vast amphitheatre of shrouded hills and forests, extending far beyond its range in one

vast sheet of stainless snow, it acknowledged the grandeur of a Highland winter scene.

Esmé and Ishbel had been kept within doors for some days by the continual fall of snow, which had blocked every road and path near; but on the first day of frost they prepared to sally out with all the impatience generated by past imprisonment.

Glenbenrough having, at breakfast time, wondered if Huistan, the shepherd, had attended to a flock of young ewes which, before the snow began, were wintering in a deep glen a long way off, the girls said they would go to Lochandhu, and ask Florh about it; so off they set, wrapped in their plaids, with their short linsey skirts, and each with a long stick in her hand, in case they encountered any obstacle.

The Roua Pass was now impassable; for who would dare to try its narrow width, concealed as it was in treacherous snow, which lay so thick that the whole surface of the hill, from top to bottom, seemed to slope without

any indentation. Esmé and Ishbel walked with elastic activity, the rarity of the atmosphere stimulating them to a bounding pace, and sending light into their eyes and brilliant colour to their cheeks. The snowy surface was thickly crusted; but they passed quickly and carefully over it, for a false step would have plunged them into deep yielding wreaths of snow.

Florh was delighted to see them; and Ewen, who was seated moodily by the fire, showed more open pleasure than usual. As Florh had feared, he had done little good since Normal's departure, but had kept much to the fireside, spending his time in sedentary occupation. He was just now engaged in alternately shaping a piece of wood into an otter, and polishing a pair of pistols; which Normal had possessed, and left, with other things, in his care.

Huistan was without, but would be in presently; and Florh began, with busy alacrity, to prepare luncheon for her dear young ladies. She roasted eggs in the peat ashes, fried slices

of mutton ham, and mixed rich cream, eggs, sugar, and whisky into a delicious compound, called "old man's milk." Esmé asked her about Jeanie Cameron, when Ewen left the room: Florh told her that she and Ewen had had no further interviews; but that she had heard Jeanie was going, whenever the weather permitted, to visit an aunt in the town of Braemorin, as Jeanie had had a "heavy cold" all winter, and her father thought her very "dwining."

Esmé, taking up one of Normal's pistols, saw her own name scratched, in a rude way, upon the stock: she recollected the day she had done it with a pin, after Normal had given her some lessons in firing at a mark; and that he had seemed anything but displeased at the disfigurement.

"It's me that misses Normal, och hone!" said Florh, as she eyed Esmé with the pistol, while busily preparing her hospitable repast.

"And so we all do, Florh," Ishbel replied; "I wish he was home again."

“An’ I’m afraid that day won’t shine for some time yet,” answered Florh.

“Why did you not ask Normal to take Ewen with him, Florh?” Ishbel said; “I am sure he would have done it: and Ewen seems so out of spirits this winter.”

“I wanted it, Ishbel, methal, but I had not the luck to succeed: Normal went against me in it. He said he would send for Ewen next Martinmass, if he was still in foreign parts then.”

“Oh! if you had persevered, I am sure Normal would have taken him,” Ishbel replied: “you know you always can succeed in what you like, Florh.”

Florh smiled grimly, but then continued in a disconsolate tone,

“No, Ishbel, ma guil, the luck has gone through other wi’ me this year. There’s nothing happened but disappointment and harm. Normal has gone away; and he should never have needed to go. Who knows but his fate may gang all astray! He left his

ain land with a dreeful heart. What would be said if he bides away for many a day?"

Ishbel's eyes filled with tears, but Esmé was silent; and Florh proceeded, addressing the former,

"Normal went away: an' it must have been a strange wish for mysel' to desire that my youngest, best-liket son would have gone too. I canna see the end o't with Ewen. Ye ken he has been contracted this many years to Jeanie Cameron, the shepherd's daughter, near Dreumah. Weel, weel! the lassie lost conceit o' him, and has nearly broke his heart by her ways and incomprehensibeelity: his pride as weel as his love is wounded near to the death by her treatment o' him; an' me, too. Hae na I slaved to save the silver penny for the day their wedding would come round? And hae na I settled for the bigging an' the plenishing o' their hoose? Aye, even marked the very spot on Arduashien, and thought o' the days o' my old age, when my son wad be happy in it wi' his wife, all through my

doings; and when I wad see my foster son as happy in his ain father's hall! Noo, all—all is thrown black upon me. My Ewen has his wedding-day broke off in his teeth; an' he seems that brooding, that I canna think what will come o' it: I dare na think he'll ever get o'er it. Huistan is a good son, but he's nothing to me compared wi' Ewen: I care na bye for him compared wi' Ewen. And Normal! och hone! Normal's away!"

"Well, Florh!" Esmé said at last, when she ceased, "you must have patience. Ewen and Jeanie may renew all their old mutual feelings again: never mind his present sulki-ness. As for Normal, I am very glad he went abroad; for I am sure he will enjoy himself very much, and travelling will be a good thing for him in every way. You should be contented with such a son as Huistan, who has won respect and a good name for himself: this should make you very proud of him."

"Content, content, Esmé!" Florh exclaimed quickly. "Troth an' I'm no content. My mind

is sae unsettled, I wad rather worse or better wad come at once. My plans are a' upset."

"Don't utter such a wish as that, Florh," Esmé said: "you may bring real evil on yourself. I can't bear forespeaking."

"Nor I," Ishbel added; "there is nothing I am more superstitious about!"

While they were seated at Florh's smoking table, the wind began suddenly, and, at first almost inaudibly, to blow, accompanied by drifting showers of sleety snow. The girls looked up in dismay at the sky,—bright blue but half an hour ago, now completely overcast by an ominous leaden hue. The wind rose into a few loud wailing blasts that almost shook the cottage, and then died quietly away; while the snow drove straight down in small feathery particles, that fell with blinding velocity and thickness.

Ere the wind quite ceased, Huistan entered with Ewen, who had gone up to the sheep fank in search of him; both their plaids were encumbered by deep folds of snow, and it

lay like a thick thatch upon the top of their Kilmarnock bonnets. Huistan's steady face was in unusual excitement; he scarce waited to salute the young ladies, ere he hurriedly addressed his mother :

"Mither, I must be off to Glen Madhu! A *feeding* storm is coming on here, and has been at it all night up there. I must see can the ewies be driven to the hill fank yonder, puir beasties." And then turning to Esmé: "Will ye tell the laird o't, Miss Esmé? I was na going till the morn; but I see now no time can be lost. I was up all night on Ben Dollo: the wedders are all safe, and Sandie Mac Tavish and Tam Mac Gillivray are to stop in the bothy."

"Had not you better go too, Ewen?" Esmé said.

"Na, na," Huistan interrupted; "he must stay here to get ye baith safe hame, Miss Esmé, an' to be at hand for fear my mither will want him. I'll be hame by the morn. Hie! Conas and Freuchen—gude collies—hie to the ewies!"

His two shepherd dogs wagged their tails, and looked in the direction of Glen Madhu: they knew as well as he did where they were going, and how much they were needed.

Florh hastily cut off a lump of cheese, and crammed it, with some oat cake, into Huistan's pocket; she filled a flask with whisky, which she also put in, and then she pulled a dry plaid that hung upon a nail, and was going to take off the snowy one he had on. But Ewen grumbled selfishly that that was his Sabbath plaid: "Was there no worse one to give?" Huistan, with a laugh, told him to keep it: the climbing of the hills would keep him warm without it; and, wrapping his damp plaid about him again, he set off with his faithful dogs.

The storm was, indeed, a "feeding" one; there was no wind or drift, but the snow fell so thick and continuously, that in a few hours the present depth was fearfully increased. Esmé and Ishbel declared they could wait no longer; so Florh and Ewen got ready a little conical-

shaped cart, called a *lobahn*, used in the Highlands for carrying turf over morass and mossy tracts; and in this—covered up with Ewen's best plaid—they proceeded, he leading the wise old hill pony by the head.

Scarcely had they got upon the road beyond the flat at the loch, when, with a wild shriek, the winds seemed to rise together from every point, and meet midway in the sky above. Before the travellers could well remark it in words, the weather changed its aspect: the snow seemed to dash itself enraged into their faces, and hurtled with the blast in eddying whirlpools in the air. The previous light-formed depths rose from the ground like swelling, frothing waves; and the storm-gust blew with fury, bringing down overwhelming drifts from the surrounding hills.

The girls crouched down in the rude cart, and Ewen crept as far beneath it as the cumbersome wheels permitted. The pony, in its sagacity turning round to leeward, holding its head lowered to the storm; which increased

momentarily until it reached its wildest, loudest height. Any conveyance less low and solid than the lobahn would have been lifted up and carried bodily before it; but the cart merely rocked and groaned in the blast, while the girls kept silence within.

The tempest slackened after a while, and the winds went moaning back to the hills; there to recruit and come forth again by-and-bye with redoubled strength. The pony, at the first lull in the storm, and before Ewen had even sprung to his feet, plunged forward, and made for Lochandhu. Ewen urged it on with every expression of Gaelic encouragement; for the sooner they could regain his mother's cottage the better: to attempt to go on to Glenbenrough was, indeed, impracticable for them; though Ewen did it by himself a little later. The winds were still lulled when they reached Lochandhu; but the snow, resuming its former course, came down thick and blindingly: the girls were half buried beneath it as they sat in the cart.

When they went in, Ewen unyoked and mounted the pony, and rode off to tell at Glenbenrough of the young ladies' safe detention there: he could make out the route singly quite well. But he did not return that night to tell of it; for ere he reached the house, the tempest came on, as it had threatened, with renewed force and violence: it was one of the most fearful nights ever remembered in that part of the country.

No one unacquainted with the capricious fury of a Highland winter storm, could conceive its present violence; or, unless early inured, could have withstood it long. Sheep were rolled over, and catacombed in gullies on the hills; the stones, loosened on the walls of the fanks, were hurled in upon the suffering brute creatures that sought their shelter; the small stacks of hay and straw beside the poor peasants' homesteads were thrown down, and blown ruthlessly to destruction; and many a hill cottage home was saved from the same fate only by the antagonistic weight of the snow, which

drove against, and formed solid outer walls for the blast to blow upon.

In some cottages, high above the raving of the winds, might be heard the untuneful voices of the terrified inmates, rising to the stormy heavens in a psalm of supplication, as the darkness and the peril increased; their sense of danger being quickened by the fear of the frozen torrents giving way and coming down upon them in *spates*, carrying away their live stock or farming implements.

Florh had given up her bed, with her fine linen sheets and best blankets upon it, to Esmé and Ishbel, and sat wakeful by the glowing fire; for no one might think of sleep. Every plank in the house creaked, as if in a storm-tossed ship at sea; and the wind, blowing down the chimney, sent the ashes swirling from the hearth. As the night wore on, the maternal heart of Florh went back to her son Huistan, out upon the hills. Yet upon the hills he scarce could be—at least not in life—unless he were in the shelter of some deep

cave, with his faithful dogs huddled close upon his body keeping it in living warmth.

She moaned and ejaculated the live-long night, her thoughts wandering, and expressing themselves aloud.

“Och hone! och hone a rie! my son Huistan, where are ye? where are ye? Ye’re my first-born bairn, an’ were your father’s darling! Why did I loe Ewen the better? Ewen never received father and mither’s kiss on one cheek, tyne the other: he’s the bairn o’ my lanely life, but ye were the toddling joy o’ us both thegither.”

“Don’t be frightened Florh,” Ishbel would say, looking out upon her from the darkness; “Huistan is such a strong man, he would gain shelter in spite of the storm.”

“Huistan is safe in the bothy on Ben Madhu, just now, I hope, Florh,” Esmé added, as they tried to turn her from fear into hopefulness: “the storm did not become so violent until long after he had left.”

“Aye, bairn; but you don’t know that

Huistan, I hae always thought, wad die for the sake o' his duty: he wad help the bit ewies wi' his ain life; it's his nature." And then relapsing into soliloquy, she continued, "Oh, Huistan! I hae had your winding-sheet ready in my kist, an' Ewen's, an' my ain this mony a day; but I do na wish now that your's would be first!"

"Florh, what beautiful sheets these are," Ishbel said in a nervous tone; "are they your own spinning?"

But Florh only continued her own train of thought, and thrilled the girls by singing a verse of mournful lament, her voice wailing fitfully with the rise and fall of the rhythm.

"White were the sheets
And embroidered the cover,
But his sheets are more white
And his canopy grander,
And sounder he sleeps
Where the hill foxes wander.
Och hone! och hone a rie!"

"Do, dear Florh, sing a hymn," Ishbel said faintly; "it would be better than that."

It might be near the dawn, but the snow still fell so thick, and the window was so darkly blocked, it was almost impossible to guess correctly, when Florh fell into a troubled sleep on her seat before the fire. Esmé was also beginning to dream, when a faint sound at the door aroused her into wakefulness again. The wind had died away latterly, and the low wailing voice they now heard was not that proceeding from it. There was evidently some one, or something, seeking to get in.

Ishbel whispered to Esmé, "Oh! what can it be? Don't let Florh hear it; she will think it is a warning."

They both sat up, and an awful feeling chilled their blood, when the unearthly cry ceased on a sudden, and something outside sprang up against the latch and scratched violently at the door. Esmé now did not hesitate, but, getting out of bed, noiselessly undid the door; a mass of snow falling into the room from the laden thatch as she did so.

A rough, whitened dog bounded in, and then

fell upon the floor. The noise woke Florh. It was Conas, Huistan's dog; but scarcely discernable: his bristly red coat was covered with snow, and his intelligent eyes seemed glazing in death as he turned them mournfully on Florh, and stretched him on his side, his tongue lolling out thirstily at its full length.

Florh put her finger to her mouth, and whispered,

"Don't speak, don't speak; if ye do ye'll excite him, and the spark o' life will fly. He's fair done: he has come a weary travel wi' news to us: he must na die till I hear 't."

With eyes averted from the dog, she raked the fire together and hastily heated some milk; she then poured whisky into a basin, and, kneeling down, lifted the poor collie's numbed and nerveless feet, and dipped them into it; rubbing the region of its heart until, the snow melting from its coat with the warmth, it lay in a pool of water. She next dragged it back, and laid it in a dark, dry corner; then, putting the milk before it, she for the first

time addressed the animal in an authoritative tone, desiring it to drink.

The poor dog feebly put out his tongue and tried to lap from where it lay; and, after a few mouthfuls, she poured the rest down his throat. Conas seemed reviving: he made a staggering attempt to rise, and gave a low howl; but Florh struck him on the head and, in Gaelic, forbade him at his peril to move. He lay down again, casting mute wistful glances; but Florh stood before him, and, having ordered him to lie there in silence, she moved away.

The girls were watching the scene with intense interest, and admired Florh's presence of mind. The animal had evidently come a long and perilous journey, and brought news from Huistan; but no one there could have acted on any intelligence: they must wait till Ewen's arrival from Glenbenrough before anything whatsoever could be done; and the dog was so nearly exhausted, that any certain good from him as guide must depend on his life being sustained by rest and quiet. Florh made

some oatmeal porridge and milk, in about half an hour, and again desired the animal to partake ; and this time he sat up and ate it all.

As morning advanced, the girls and Florh stood at the cottage door and looked out. The snow had ceased to fall, as well it might ; it had so deeply covered the earth that the shapes of the hills were altered beneath it : they rose in smoothened masses, with curving outlines, against the wintry sky : the hollow of the loch beneath was filled, almost to a level with the threshold where they stood ; the very hills seemed to have found a snowy grave.

While Florh was preparing tea for breakfast, Conas suddenly rose from his corner : already he had resumed his own brisk, wiry aspect, and he now went to the door sniffing uneasily, then returned to Florh and gazed in her face with a look of entreaty, almost human in its expression. She shook her head and groaned, and prayed for Ewen's return. The dog's impatience increased in a few minutes : he whined and scratched upon the floor with

his paws, and ran to and fro from the table to the door. She, shortly after, rose up too and ran to the door.

A cavalcade was in sight, coming in the direction from Glenbenrough. It was the laird himself, mounted on one of the farm horses, with Ewen, the grieve, and gamekeeper, all similarly riding. The horses on which were the two latter, were intended for Esmé and Ishbel to ride home. The snow plough had also been put in requisition from the house to the bridge, and a considerable way beyond.

Scarcely had Glenbenrough been welcomed by his daughters, ere they and Florh changed his purpose by telling him of their fears for Huistan.

“Ye see, laird,” Florh exclaimed, “he may be in the bothy on the height o’ Ben Madhu; an’ if so, he’s safe enough, wi’ meat an’ wi’ whisky in his pocket: but sitting the lone hours o’ night, I hae calculated it and doubt it. The storm was hours in advance up yonder o’ us here, an’ he wad have been no time

arrived in Glen Madhu when the worst drift, that came on here later, was down upon him there. The dumb collie tells ye to go to your brither," Florh cried excitedly, turning to Ewen. "Bide no a moment longer!"

"I was going without your word," Ewen returned, sullenly: "the collie dog did no come here for nothing."

"We'll all go. Stop!" exclaimed Glenbenrough. "Grieve, take the horse, you'll go quicker on it, and get down before us to Sandie Cameron's house, and turn out him and his two sons: let them take their light spades; and give us your's, Florh; and put whisky in the flasks. We'll ride as far as Drasky Craig, lads, by the road, leave the beasts there, and keep up by the heights, and come down first upon Ben Madhu bothy. Girls, you'll stay here until my return."

"That we will, papa!" Esmé and Ishbel exclaimed, delighted at the energy which planned the right course and carried it into immediate action. The grieve was scarcely out of sight,

awkwardly lumbering and plunging on the straining horse through the deep snowed road, when the laird and Ewen and the gamekeeper were after him. Ewen, by Florh's advice, held Conas in awkward durance on the saddle before him, until Drasky Craig should be reached.

They were away all that winter day, and the girls watched the face of the heavens with sickening anxiety, as with the afternoon fading light, the snow again began to fall in those small, ominous, feathery particles, which betokened the gathering down-come of the masses.

It was not until upwards of four hours after they left Lochandhu that the laird and his men came upon the roof of the bothy on Ben Madhu. They had scrambled painfully and wearily along the mountain summits, from where they had left the horses on the road beneath, half an hour's ride from Lochandhu; and, but for the instinct which guided them, the whole party might have lain buried in some of the deep gullies intersecting the

hills, and sheeted deceitfully over by the drifted snow.

The bothy was built against a projecting rock; and who but those who knew the exact spot through all its altered bearings, could discover it now? It was completely hid in the snow, and even the wicker door blocked to the top. They had marked their way by shrill shouts and whistles; but had never gained response, save the occasional dull flap of a startled grouse or ptarmigan, as it rose and flew heavily from the snow.

Sound must have been Huistan's sleep if he heard them not now, were he within the bothy, as they shovelled the snow from the entrance; but the laird and Ewen both felt already sure he was not there, and Conas's impatience alone betrayed it: he ran on in advance, as if to descend the hill, and whined and moved uneasily while they entered the bothy. It was utterly deserted, and the damp and burnt turf odour smelt like a vault.

The men looked at each other and shook

their heads, muttering, "Och, och, Huistan voch!"* and Glenbenrough, putting his hand across his eyes, said in a shaken voice,

"My good Huistan! oh, too good and faithful!"

Ewen drew his bonnet over his eyes, and turned his face from the others: his nature never liked to show itself where tenderness might be revealed. But the most hardening of griefs was stealing over him: he thought he would be a wronged man if he now lost brother as well as love.

They rested for a few moments, and debated how to proceed; the evening was already beginning to fall, and to be benighted there would be dreary work. Suddenly a voice rose above theirs, and sent them out hurriedly to the open door: the howl of a dog came clear and piteously from the glen below.

"Coming, Conas, coming!" cried Ewen, as he stumbled forward down the hill, Glenben-

* Oh! oh! poor Hugh.

rough at his side, and the others following with more habitual tardiness. The dog was in sight: he lay at the foot of a mound of snow, unstained and unruffled. Something of a reddish colour protruded from the surface. Conas lay with his head thrown back, wailing unceasingly until they approached.

Ewen reached the spot first, and exclaiming, "There lies Freuchen, buried!" began to throw off the snow, until the stiffened body of the dog lay visible. Suddenly Glenbenrough uttered a cry of distress. Ewen started back, and rushing from the spot, sat him down in the snow some distance off: he knew what still lay there.

Freuchen had died while scratching the ever-falling snow from off his master's body: his paws were frozen in the snow wreath, which, as it formed, he had aye kept scratching off from the cold face beneath. This was his part, while the other dog, in his instinct, went home for further help.

With eyes closed in painless slumber, and

hands crossed in prayer upon his breast, the faithful shepherd lay ; his sunburnt face waxed white as the surrounding evening-tinted snow ; and the strong-made limbs that had borne him over every hill and glen around, lying quiet now, never more to tread his native heather, or bow in prayer upon the solitary mountain heights.

When the last plaid was wound round the frozen body, Ewen came forward, and, without word or comment, placed his shoulder with the others beneath the stiffened corpse, and so helped to carry his only brother along. Glenbenrough walked first, and maintained deep silence also.

Three times did Conas stop the cavalcade, in the intuitive sagacity of his species, as he came upon a wreath underneath which a sheep still breathed—known by the small circular spot made on the surface by the warm breath of the sheep buried beneath ; and, unassisted, the sagacious animal dug them out, and drove them on to the sheep fank, which the mourn-

ful bearers passed, about a mile from where Huistan had lain him down. And as they passed, they whispered,

“See! he saved nigh all the ewies first! There they are, housed within the fank! It was his last journey to drive the very last o’ them into safety, when the blast came down upon himsel’. Och Huistan voch!”

And the laird, as he heard the bleating of the shepherdless sheep from their shelter, mournfully exclaimed, “Huistan, I would have given all my flocks for your life.”

When they came to Sandie Cameron’s house, about a mile from Lochandhu, they halted. Ewen and Glenbenrough pressed on, to break to Florh the afflicting visitation; also, the laird desired to get Esmé and Ishbel home from the house of death. They sobbed more for Huistan than did his mother: it is not the way among the Highland lower classes; but her grief took vent in wild Gaelic apostrophe, and passionate demonstration of gesture.

“My bairn! my bairn! an’ was the snow

wreath your winding-sheet? an' the dumb collie your dying mourner? How hae ye been cut off with a stroke, and departed for ever from your mither an' your countrie! Gae bring him in, till I make my moan on my eldest son. I didna prize him sufficient afore. Oh, Ewen, Ewen! ye're the only one now. Oh! dinna never gae break your mither's heart. Can ye be to me as eldest and youngest son? Gae, get ye gone for my brave Huistan, wha was an earthly gude shepherd, and gave his life for his charge. Bring him in, till I cry for his loss—cry sair, cry sair! I am wearied and tentless now for my eldest son!"

The snow was falling fast and gloomily as the girls reached home, and the rising winds had been muttering fierce threats of speedy outbreak from the hills, as, with a man at the head of each horse, they had made their way in the gathering darkness of evening from Lochandhu to Glenbenrough. More than once had they been dismounted by the headlong plunge of the horse, but thrown always harm-

lessly on the soft-piled snow ; and, by the time the house was reached, excitement, grief, and cold had roughly tried the buoyant, but fine-strung frames of the Highland girls. Glenbenrough was so grieved and shocked at Huistan's loss, that he retired to his study, and the girls took tea in their own room.

The impression of Huistan's sad wintry death did not wear off with them for long. Florh received the utmost sympathy of their hearts in this trial, while Glenbenrough marked his in many substantial ways. He installed Florh rent free at Lochandhu, and gave her Huistan's saved earnings (which he had always lodged with the laird), with very large interest added. He also defrayed the costs of Huistan's funeral ; which took place on a scale sufficient to gratify even the pride of Florh and Ewen on this point : for this is one of the most honoured ceremonies in the Highlands. The laird acted as chief mourner, with mother and son, and put up a tablet to the memory of his faithful servant, in

the little churchyard on the banks of Loch Monach.

When spring advanced, Ewen alone, and without opinion or approval asked from any other, built a cairn on the lonely spot where his brother died: he piled the upper stones into such a sharp conical form that no succeeding snows of winter ever rested upon the top, in obliteration of the rugged, mindful monument in gloomy Glen Madhu.

CHAPTER II.

TIDINGS FROM ENGLAND.

Thus with delight we linger to survey
The promised joys of life's unmeasured way ;
Thus, from afar, each dim discovered scene
More pleasing seems than all the past hath been ;
And every form that fancy can repair
From dark oblivion glows divinely there.

CAMPBELL'S *Pleasures of Hope*.

THE sadness which the mournful event of Huistan's death had thrown over the household of Glenbenrough, was relieved by the news constantly communicated by Norah of her visit to Fairleigh Park. Norah wrote very long letters, and such as only sisters write to each other. In the absence of the dear familiar

faces to afford the silent sympathy of look or smile, where her natural reserve might withhold spoken words, Norah wrote more fully than she might have spoken; pouring forth unreservedly all her enjoyments, observations, hopes, fears, forebodings, and realizations, in fluent phrases.

Her letters were addressed to Esmé and Ishbel, who read them aloud to their beloved father, as he sat before the evening fire, warming his open hands at the flame of the resinous native pine, the genial glow of his kindly nature brightening his listening face, as he smiled or interposed gay comment.

Norah ought to have been very happy at Fairleigh Park. It was a luxurious, delightful house, and Sir Henry and Lady Lauriston were more than kind to Norah. Lady Lauriston, to good sense and a bright straight-forward disposition, united thoughtfulness for every one, and had the happy art of combining comfort with discipline. Sir Henry, with his easy temper, enjoyed life without a shadow.

Norah wrote descriptions of all the neighbouring places and people, adding that many invitations were pouring in upon Sir Henry and Lady Lauriston, and that they spoke of making hospitable reply by-and-bye.

There were some very fine places in the neighbourhood, and their possessions were affluent; but Norah said she might characterize the scenery and people alike, as very rich, cultivated, and agreeable, but rather flat. She could not now describe an ancient small-windowed manor-house like that of Forran, where, when you drove up, you saw the old slip-shod butler, with his nightcap on, pursuing a trespassing Highland cow, to drive her from before the hall door, and who, beckoning you in with friendly fore-finger, showed you into a mouldy uninhabited state-room, announcing "that her leddyship was een the hoose, seeing the lassies making the marmalade, but she wad appear if-the-now." Nor could she compare the snug rectory, with its trellised roses and smooth-shaven lawn, to the new free-

church manse built on the heights of Craig Corrloo, in the shape of a barn, to avoid all imputation of worldly vanity; while Mrs. Lee, the rector's delicate, insipidly-pretty wife, at Fairleigh, sitting in her boudoir ordering dinner with her house-keeper, was a contrast to Mrs. Dr. Macconochie, with tucked-up skirts and sleeves, her arms floured to the elbow, feeding her poultry with cold porridge on the banks of Loch Namoke.

The houses she characterised as all comfortable, well-arranged, and some of them very grand; the people all of such outward similarity in manner, style, and education, that, not at morning visits, nor stiff dinner parties, could she detect any peculiarity marked enough to excite her sense of the ludicrous.

Norah's letters as yet bore the impress of quiet, grateful happiness, and showed no exuberance of spirit, save when she wrote after an exhilarating canter on the beautiful horse Sir Henry had given to her: indeed, to judge by her letters, riding and listening to Mr.

Lee's sermons seemed the pleasures most congenial to her: the former distracted, the latter soothed; and Norah's well-regulated mind for once stood in need of both. But Esmé very well knew that the one element was wanting, without which the happiness or pleasures of Elysium would not have satisfied; and as she opened each successive letter, her eye would instinctively seek for Harold's name: she was longing to hear he was even in Yorkshire, and thus nearer to Norah.

At last Harold's name appeared. Quite at the end of one of her letters, Norah wrote, "I noticed a paragraph in the local paper here last night, announcing the arrival of Mr. Harold at his place, which is about fifteen miles from hence: I wonder if we will ever meet! People think more of distance in this part of the world than they do in the Highlands."

Esmé had written to Norah a long account of Harold's last evening at Glenbenrough, now a considerable time ago, and she and Ishbel had

entrusted a small parcel, addressed to Norah, to his care; more, they confessed, to give him pleasurable trouble than Norah any benefit, for it only contained some black-cock's tail-feathers. They then supposed she would have received it long since, but he had delayed somewhere on the road.

Norah's next letter contained more satisfactory particulars.

"Mr. Harold has been here," she wrote: "he called the day before yesterday, and spent all the afternoon here, and Sir Henry and Lady L. asked him to dine yesterday, when he came. He has been in London transacting some business since he left the North. Mr. Marchmoram and Mr. Auber are there, also, just now. I asked Mr. Harold a great deal about the latter, dear Esmé. He says Mr. Auber has been engaged in a large lawsuit, which, if he gains it, will give him another property in another county (the name of his place is Emersant Park, in Devonshire); but as it is still, and will be for some time, unde-

cided, he talks of going abroad, and spending the winter at Rome. I knew by Mr. Harold's face, when he was speaking of Mr. Auber, that he thought of you, Esmé darling! and he looked uncomfortable: he spoke with a sort of restraint, quite different from the way in which he mentioned Mr. Marchmoram. Esmé, dearest, don't let yourself think about this Mr. Auber. If you allow yourself to run riot in imagination during the long winter months, and he should not be back next autumn, the pleasures of autumn would then be gone; but, even if he does return, I wish, I wish you would look upon his society in the abstract light of pleasure, merely: as if it was a delightful book. I can't help feeling there is almost as little outward vitality of life and action in him as in a book. He is a man who will always take care of his own peace; and do you take care he does not quite wreck your's.

“In my next I will ask about different home matters, but I write so hurriedly to-day. Is Kelpie's coat becoming rough? Give him

an apple from me. The Duke of Brittonberg and Lady Ida Beauregard are expected shortly at the Castle; indeed, Mr. Harold thought they might arrive to-day. When they come to Yorkshire, I will not see so much of Mr. Harold, for he will be a great deal with them, I hear. Lady Ida takes quite a sisterly charge over him: she tries dominion more or less over every one that comes in her way, I believe. She is feared here, but not loved: Lady Lauriston says she is so masculine, and with no youthfulness of feeling about her; though her character, as a child, was headstrong, wild, and impetuous to an extreme!"

Nearly ten days elapsed ere Norah wrote again, and then she spoke more fully.

“Fairleigh Park.

“MY OWN DEAR ESMÉ AND ISHBEL,

“I sit down to have a long chat with you both, and can write uninterruptedly, for Sir Henry and Lady Lauriston have gone to call at Brittonberg Castle, which is about fourteen

miles from here, in the opposite direction from Harold's Hall, and they have taken Julia with them. They wished me to go also, but I excused myself: I did not wish to go, for I had seen the place before, at a distance,—and a splendid pile of building it is. I have some news to give which I think will interest you both.

“A few days after I wrote last, a note came from Mr. Harold inviting Sir H. and Lady L., Julia and myself, to dine, and meet the Duke and Lady Ida, who were staying there: accordingly on Thursday evening, at half past six o'clock, we left, and reached Harold's Hall by eight. You will like to hear of our dresses: I wore my gold-coloured silk (which you have never seen) and made up a wreath of holly, spiked with snowberries, in our own fashion. Julia wore pale blue silk, with Christmas roses, and looked very pretty: a dress that would have suited you, Esmé. It being dark ere we reached the Hall, I cannot describe the outward appearance of the house, which is on a very large scale; but the approach was up an avenue

of grand old elms, and in the park, which extends for miles, are some magnificent oaks of great age.

“What a contrast to the little sitting-room of Dreumah was the spacious suite of reception rooms at Harold’s Hall. They were all lighted up, the house being full of company and a large party of neighbouring friends assembled, and the effect was splendid. Mr. Harold was the same here, as host at the head of that grand dining-table, as he was sitting against the glowing turf fire at Dreumah: not changed either in look, voice, or manner; save, perhaps, a little less free and lively, as if his duties as host made him more grave. The people and the scene here were altogether different from Glenbenrough. Mr. Harold took Lady Morn-den into dinner, and Lady Ida sat on his right hand: and who, think you, took her? (Here Esmé’s eyes, as she read, were dimmed for a moment.) Mr. Marchmoram! I was so surprised and so glad to see him in the crowd of gentlemen, for you may imagine I felt in-

wardly not a little shy. He has gone to Brittonberg to-day: and I will hear his name frequently mentioned for some time to come, as he is to stand for the borough of Lillsdale, a most important seat. The late member, Sir Francis Sornton, died in a very melancholy way last week, after lingering for some time, in consequence of a dreadful accident while hunting: every one mourns for him, and pities his poor young wife, who is in an almost distracted state. I can fancy her feeling dreadfully the clamorous selfishness of rival candidates struggling to fill her dead husband's seat the moment his own voice became silent. Of course Mr. Marchmoram has nothing to do with this: Sir Francis was no friend of his, and he must attempt and do the best for the views of his party. The Duke's interest goes with Mr. Marchmoram, and since I came here I have heard much of his rising talent: they say that the Duke is so aware of it, that since his new accession to office, he has very evidently desired strongly the co-operation of Mr. March-

moram, and himself proposed this opening of Lillsdale.

“The conservatory at Harold’s Hall is very beautiful, and Mr. Harold himself gathered me a lovely bouquet of exquisite heaths in the evening: I would like to show them to Florh at Lochandhu, telling her it was English heather. Lady Mornden sang a little; and, to please Mr. Harold, I sang a few of our Highland airs; but Lady Ida’s manner prevented my attempting anything more: it was too condescending to suit my Highland blood. Dear Esmé, I think she would rouse the hot blood into your cheek too, readily, merely by her own coldness: her manner to myself does not please me at all. Perhaps she could not understand Mr. Harold’s desire of being polite to me, after our long intimacy at Dreumah; but even he reddened as he overheard the supercilious way in which she deigned to cross-question me as to Glenbenrough.

“Mr. Marchmoram was near me at the time; and his face twitched, and those strange lights

in his eyes began to play when Lady Ida spoke to me as she did. The weight of public life seems already pressing heavily upon him: he was silent and absent; rarely spoke to any lady, and even his manner to myself I thought strange. He sat down frequently beside me; but never once spoke freely of home.

After Lady Ida had relapsed into silence, Lady Jane Trevor put some unusual silly questions, asking me about you, Esmé; whether we had in our intimacy with the gentlemen of Derrooma (as she pronounced Dreumah) converted them into Highland cousinship; and whether Mr. Marchmoram had not taught you to read. At first I answered her in a joking way; but seeing a little sort of bitterness mixing with her impertinence, I changed my manner, and discomfited her by very polite negatives. It seemed to me that while she spoke she always glanced at Lady Ida, who was latterly talking to Mr. Marchmoram; and I know that both of them heard Lady Jane's and my short skirmish. Was it not strange? What dislike

or interest of any sort could these two grand ladies have in us? Lady Ida might not choose her cousin to talk too much to me; but then there were very few other young ladies present. She is a fine, *distinguée* looking woman, and her manner was to me a study. She talked a great deal with Mr. Marchmoram, I suppose in consequence of this present political connection; but I thought her manner to him was more disagreeable than to any one else: it was a manner that would pique a man. She spoke in a cold leading-on sort of way; but she changed it suddenly to quite a blandishing one, when, after Lady Jane ceased talking, Mr. Marchmoram rose and seemed going to converse with me: immediately Lady Ida turned, and with more expressive glances than I thought her cold bright eyes could ever give, she asked him to do some small unrefusable office, and so led him away.

“ Mr. M. did not speak of Mr. Auber, dear Esmé, nor once mention him to me; but he will, I dare say, the next time I see him. If

Mr. Marchmoram gain his election there will be a great ball at Brittonberg, I believe.

“I am going to the rectory now for a little walk, and I will likely find Mr. Lee in his greenhouse: it is a great pleasure to me conversing with him; there is something indescribably soothing in his whole tone of mind, his ideas and language, and his quiet earnest look and voice. I feel while with him that one can live in this world of cares and vexations, if we only keep the under-current pure by quiet prayer and calm thought. Artificial life makes strange crusts over original nature sometimes.

“I hope you have all my fuchsias matted ere this, and the hyacinth roots, and other bulbs dried and stored away. You and Ishbel must ride Kelpie sometimes, in turns, to keep him in order! How jealous he would be of my splendid ‘mouk’ here. The mouk is a fiery animal when he chooses. I shall bring home with me a silver cast of his shoe as a remembrance. Sir Henry says he is really mine, and shall accompany me North; but he

would never do on the Highland roads: besides, what would he do for society? How he would disdain Kelpie, Suila, and Methal!

“I am so grieved at not having said goodbye to dear Normal. I have written to-day in hopes of a letter still finding him in London, and scolded him well for not having returned to say goodbye to you, Esmé, if he missed you the last day he was at Glenbenrough. And yet I can partly understand it: some people can’t bear to say goodbye if they feel it very much. He will be back next autumn, I dare-say, and we must always write to him.

“Is papa busy just now? Tell him that when he comes for me, he must come in good time, that we may enjoy ourselves here together; and he must be at his leisure all the time. Mr. Harold wishes us to spend a day at Harold’s Hall this week, so that I may see it by daylight. I don’t know if Lady Lauriston agreed or not.

“Now what a long letter I have written. Make generous return. Fondest love and

kisses; and ever, dearest Esmé and Ishbel, believe in the affection of

“Your loving sister,

“NORAH.”

Norah was having a happy time. She said Harold was unchanged—he was near her; and she seemed actually carrying on communion with him almost as easy and uninterrupted as that of the past Highland autumn. All went smoothly with her. During the first few weeks of her stay she was in a state of suspense; but delightful suspense: she might have felt sure all the time that every day must bring him nearer Yorkshire; and then she had all the pleasures of change about her to distract even suspense. He was come now, and her joy might well be complete: the hauteur of Lady Ida, and the repellent scrutiny of her friend, should be but as salt making wholesome the sweetness of her present life. Esmé felt assured that Harold’s eye was too steady, and his heart too interested, to allow any attempt on their

part to embitter Norah's happiness. He could ward off, whenever he chose, any rough breeze that did more than temper the warm cloudless intercourse of himself and Norah.

CHAPTER III.

A WOUNDED HEART AND A BROKEN BONE
—MISS CHRISTY'S WILL.

A moment to ponder—a season to grieve,
The light of the moon—the shadows of eve.

MOIR.

O! how can I to that lady ride,
Wi' saving o' my dignitie?

SCOTT.

THE storms and snow-drifts of January had brought busy times and duties. There were jovial gatherings in many a Christmas Highland home, amongst blithe-hearted lairds and ladies; and, alas! as winter protracted its

severity, there was much destitution amongst the poor people fasting on distant snowy heights. Then was the time for the willing hearts and hands of Glenbenrough and of other places, who would hear the cry of hunger from many a hill-side hamlet, and see the miserable stock of fodder diminish daily, the starving ill-fed cow refuse her nourishing milk—when the oatmeal and the potatoes, produce of their arable crofts, were finished; basket and girdle, emptied out; and nought left to live by, save the warmth from their goodly stacks of peat, the only produce of the sterile land which grew uncultivated and without stint for them. Then was the time for Glenbenrough to send bounties of meal, corn, and fodder from his own well-managed stores: and had the destitution seemed like to swallow up even these, he himself, his daughters, and servants, all would have exchanged plenty for sufficiency, and their superabundance would have swelled the store of meal saved for the poor thankful tenants.

Then, fighting against sudden showers of blinding sleet and rain, climbing painfully the slippery rugged mountain path, might Esmé and Ishbel themselves be seen carrying hot soup, or strengthening wine, to some worn-out Highland widow, desolate of helping children, and crooning hungrily over the unused fire in her smoky snow-covered hovel; which, without their watching eye and ministering hand, would soon become her grave. The gamekeeper's gun, bringing down the destructive ravenous hares that made inroad on the garden banks, would nightly wake the echoes; and the cauldron, filled with their seething flesh, steaming daily under charge of his wife, would give nourishing food to the children, who waited daily with their little pitchers for a supply.

But a change had come over Esmé: her mental state was the reverse of the outward course of nature. During the quiet clear days of approaching winter the storm raged wild within her breast; and then, as the tempest.

driven snow of the outer world came hurrying wildly on, her inner being stilled daily more and more, until the beautiful calm of a sun-set sky prevailed. Esmé found peace of mind, in so far that self-regulation was given, at last to the struggling, praying soul: the brilliant colours of ardent hope, the sadder hues of despairing love, and the shifting tints of restless longing, that in turns depicted her emotions, were toned down to the softened sober light of trust, and she calmed down into quietude.

At first, and for months, she could not save herself from the baneful influence of the associations that everywhere haunted her. March-moram's foot had trod where even her's now wandered; the same heather had bent beneath the tread of each; his voice had awoken the echoes of all the distant hills; his lips had drunk from the water of her favourite spring; even the midnight darkness of her room was penetrated by his fancied shade: there—even there—had he stood. She would start from her sleep and listen breathlessly for the deep

low voice. What was this come over her? what had he left? a haunting, dreaming, fearful infatuation. Those eyes of his met her everywhere; that voice, that look, made her start and sigh, waking and sleeping, and caused sudden smiles—no one guessed why—or the unbidden tear, as she sat pale and absent, busy in memory's scenes.

And even another would rise to her memory; he who had made her taste so many hours of intellectual rapture—he who had first opened up to her the springs of thought, leading on the bright current in sparkling swiftness, until it gained volume enough to seek a nobler region and wider scope, and rushed into the depth of Marchmoram's strong heart.

Suffering the penalty of her wayward fancies and feelings, too fervid for her control, poor Esmé, in those first days after the parting, would retreat to the rocks, and, throwing herself on the heather, water it with her tears. But it was not for herself; it was *at* herself she wept. She hated this dreadful weakness,

which yielded that once buoyant spirit to the one engrossing theme—the reminiscence of intercourse with other minds, one of which had likely forgotten all ere this. And had not that other abjured her, by the very love she bore him, to forget and withhold her love until he told her he could return to claim it?

Could she not forget and cast it from her? Was she ever to bear this burden, prostrating her spirit and withholding her strength from quiet loved home duties? There was no help for Esmé in her own unassisted strength: it was but weakness. The only cure came at last: a small old dark-bound volume, too long neglected by her, found its way into Esmé's trembling feverish hand. She wandered out to the hills, wrapped in her hooded tartan plaid, indifferent to the rising northern winds, and there she sat with the book opened. The sun lit up the pages as she read and read; and,—oh wonderful! passing belief, save to those who have had similar experience—here

she found her ease: aye, in the Bible she found it. And in this blessed book there is no form of human feeling, no subtle tendency of the heart and mind, which has not its record and its antidote. Here she found strength and comfort.

Norah had left her little copy of the "Christian Year," when she went away, and Esmé took to studying it also, until she liked it too well to send it after her, as she had at first intended. She loved to read, and see before her the visible imagery which she read of.

"The wheeling kite's wild solitary cry,
And, scarcely heard so high,
The dashing waters, when the air is still,
From many a torrent rill
That winds unseen beneath the shaggy fell,
Tracked by the blue-mist well;
Such sounds as wake deep silence in the heart
For thought to do her part."

And to feel,

"'Tis then we hear the voice of God within,
Pleading with care and sin:
'Child of my love, why wilt thou err from me?'"

She would repeat aloud, as she walked with Ishbel and their father to the lonely parish church, on the bright autumnal Sundays, through the pine forest and over the wild treeless hills,—

“Where is thy favoured haunt, Eternal Voice,
The region of thy choice,
Where, undisturbed by sin and earth, the soul
Owns thy entire control?
'Tis on the mountain's summit, dark and high,
When storms are hurrying by;
'Tis 'mid the strong foundations of the earth,
Where torrents have their birth.

“No sounds of worldly toil, ascending there,
Mar the full burst of prayer;
Lone nature feels that she may freely breathe,
And round us and beneath
Are heard her sacred tones: the fitful sweep
Of winds across the steep,
Through wither'd bents—romantic notes, and clear,
Meet for a hermit's ear.”

Still Marchmoram's image remained steadfast in Esmé's heart. She thought of him ever, and prayed for him nightly: but she had

strength given which sustained her. Perhaps she, having thus far conquered, and now striving against her girlish love, was stronger in her weakness than he.

It was well for Esmé that she could not see the strong man in his deadly struggles of love for herself. The war, masculine in spirit, was waged with the fearful weapons of passion: opposing feelings, ranged against each other, came into awful conflict in his breast. The image of the artless Highland girl had come ever and anon, maddeningly in its sweet refreshing beauty, and softly turned him aside from the beckoning form of a cruel, iron-handed woman, who, despite his yearning heart, called herself his fate.

There was an outer influence, too, which all this time kept its quiet careful watch over every symptom of Esmé's state. Florh knew that love's fever must run its course, and that, while it lasts, it is as little under the control of the sufferer or the alleviator, as its physical prototype; but that so soon as nature became

calmed, then the stimulative bitterness of her pungent treatment might work in its own way to restore the tone of the mind. Florh was a skilful physician. Her words dropped steadily, but never irritatingly. She never made her counsel personal: she pretended not to know how Esmé loved Marchmoram, or to suspect that he had ever spoke of love to her; but she frequently adverted to him, and then always doubtfully.

“Aye, aye; that’s a man who hauds a grip on his heart, e’en stronger than on his tongue. I ne’er read a more relentless eye, nor a lip that could sooner ope to condemn e’en himself. He’s deep: deep as the tarn o’ Corloo; and like it, clear, cold, and dark, doun to the flinty bottom!”

Then, at another time, she would make nearer approach.

“Esmé, Esmé, speak nae to me, for fear I’d up and tell what I suld na! Ye ken how I read and divine! Mind ye yon dream: an’ are ye no in waves o’ trouble? Oh! my bairn,

my bairn! may they yet sweep ye on to a broad armlet o' the salt bright sea, where ye'll find the true strength and life! Why waste ye here dreaming beside the garden river?"

And then she muttered,

"I am keeping something ever in my brain. Bairn, ye'll hae need o' me for an avenger. Oh! it gars me loup to think o' it noo, gin ever that time come!" Her eyes flashed, and she bit her lips greedily; but the flash and the clearness on her face took away from it the aspect of cruelty: there was intense excitement in it. "Oh! come the time! Shall I nae hurl shame an' remorse on his heid!"

A month or so after Huistan's death, Esmé spent a week, which, if compared with that spent simultaneously, though so far apart, by Norah, would have shown strange contrasts of life.

Miss Christy Mac Pherson broke her leg by falling on the ice on the farm pond of Phee, which she was scientifically probing at the

time with a red-hot poker, to ascertain the thickness of the frozen surface. She was carried home, and the "bone-setter" sent for. This functionary generally, in northern country parishes, supersedes (and supremely ignores) the legitimate surgeon or doctor: repudiating all modern theories, from the circulation of the blood downwards, he proceeds invariably in the ancient treatment, as handed down to him by his ancestors; who lived and fought, cured and suffered, in the times when curative tortures (such as pouring boiling oil into gunshot wounds) were commonly practised.

The bone-setter of the parish of Phee diversified his profession by following also that of a country blacksmith, as being the most in unison with his higher craft; great strength of muscle being required to twist properly the limbs of his sturdy Highland patients. Poor Miss Christy being an especial favourite, and deserving the consideration of being an important patient of high-rank, came in for Mr. Donald Mac Caw's most complicated ingenuity of treat-

ment. He first had the poker which had caused the accident heated again red-hot, and this he brandished over her leg until she yelled with the pain. When the limb was sufficiently inflamed, he took to all his manual practice, and dislocated, and rubbed, and knit and unknit the bone, in the most frightful manner; finishing, as a soother, with putting a huge poultice of butter and oatmeal upon it, and prescribing a strong tumbler of toddy to keep down fever and ensure sleep.

'Tis said faith works in bodily disease more miraculous cures than the faculty, and it may have been Miss Christy's implicit belief that prevented mortification, which, in the natural order of things, should have superinduced upon Mr. Mac Caw's treatment. Fever very soon set in, however, and under its influence she one day suddenly "went out of her mind:" for thus he apologetically accounted for the symptoms that followed. Mr. Donald Mac Caw had just been applying the gentle stimulant of switching the leg with a bunch of dry holly, when Miss

Christy started up with such sudden vigour as nearly to throw him backwards; and, seizing the holly, ere he could recover himself, she laid it with such hearty vengeance about his brawny cheeks, accompanied by several sound boxes on the ear, that he roared again for mercy.

“Hout tout, Donald Mac Caw! Do ye ken noo what it is to suffer? Do ye ken noo, man, a tenth part o’ the devilry you hae been doing on me? Look at my leg, swelled to the size o’ a churn! Is it in your power to tak it doun again? I trow not. I’ll tell the laird on ye this very night. Get ye gone out o’ my hoose!”

The bone-setter rose up; but, not yet quite crest-fallen, he glanced round the room to see if anything in the shape of a rope was at hand, with which to bind her down as a raving patient. But Miss Christy’s wits seemed doubly sharpened under her excitement; she took quiet possession of a large wooden mallet (used for mashing potatoes) and held it in readiness

under the blankets, and when Mr. Mac Caw came blandly towards her, with his hands mysteriously behind his back, and something wriggling after him like a thin grey serpent upon the floor, she waited until he was quite close enough, and then felled him with the mallet, shouting,

“Tak ye that; an’ I hope it’ll gie you a brain fever!”

The crash and the irate words reached her uncle, Mr. Macpherson, who rushed from the parlour in time to prevent further measures on either side; and the bone-setter was ejected from the room.

That night, while the family at Glenbenrough were assembled at tea in the drawing-room, old Mr. Macpherson of Phee was announced. His eyes were tearful, and his good old voice tremulous with feeling.

“Oh! laird, my poor niece Christy is very bad; her leg is swollen to such a size. And though she’s quite in her right mind, an’ never was out of it, it’s pitiable to see her

suffer. She is quite sure she is dying and winna rest, nor die easy, unless she sees you; it's just a fancy she has, an' I came to tell it. My gig is at the door, if you will come back at once wi' me."

"No!" exclaimed Glenbenrough; "but you'll send it off as fast as it can go to Dr. Mackay at Thistlebank, and I'll send off another to bring out Dr. Stewart from Braemorin, and then order a third to take you and myself back to Phee. I wonder you allowed that ignorant blacksmith to interfere in a case like this."

Accordingly, Glenbenrough proceeded half an hour later to visit Miss Christy; and, before morning, his presence and the skill of the two medical men had a good deal soothed and mitigated poor Miss Christy's sufferings. Next day, when the laird returned, he told his daughters, that if one of them would go to Phee for a week, it would be an act of charity pleasing to him and themselves: he was sure Miss Christy's recovery would be greatly enhanced by it. So Esmé, with the promptness

of her father's character, hastily prepared to go; and Ishbel superintended the packing of sundry culinary delicacies, unknown, but much to be desired, at Phee: these were sent off by a small cart, and Esmé followed later on her pony Suila.

Snow still lay deep upon the ground, but hard frost had set in. There was something in going upon this self-denying duty, which was pleasing to Esmé's present state of mind. She enjoyed the idea of roughing it: being debarred from luxury, physical or mental, she required rigour. Away with all pampering; it did not suit her now: she had ever indulged it too long. She must be strong: she must drive all weakness before her, if life were ever to be in earnest with her.

The house of Phee was very wildly situated, but very beautifully. It lay encased amidst hills of rock, heather, and scattered weeping birch; and the roar of the grand river Dual sounded not far off, as it took its foaming course past Ben Phee from the distant Dual

Ghu. As Esmé approached, she stayed Suila's pattering hoofs for many minutes, while she watched a herd of red deer on the hill. Tamed by the long protracted frost, they had come down upon it within sight of the farm-yard hay-ricks, but never would have advanced nearer: and even now they pawed the snow with snorting careless indifference, as if disdaining to seek beneath it for their food. Esmé loved the lordly creatures.

Miss Christy and her uncle exhausted all their resources of imagination and appliances in preparing a luxurious reception. The shrill voice of the former, prostrate on the parlour sofa, followed her uncle and "Jessie the lass" from room to room, as they re-arranged them to suit Esmé's fancied taste; and, when she arrived, she found that, so far as that first great principle cleanliness went, refinement would not suffer in the least. Her room was as white as a profuse display of Miss Christy's best napery could make it; and water from the delicious hill spring was in

abundant supply. It was a pleasure to concoct wonderful restoratives, in the way of original combinations of sago, cream, and calf's-foot jelly, and to see Miss Christy's newly-awakened epicurean enjoyment of them; while Esmé's keen sense of the ludicrous was kept in constant play by Miss Christy's delightful peculiarities.

The second night after her arrival, Esmé was sitting reading by the light of the turf fire, and fancied Miss Christy was dozing, when a low, cracked whisper, proceeding from the high-backed sofa on which she lay, proved the contrary.

"Miss Esmé, are ye a clerk at all?"

"A clerk! what's that, Miss Christy?"

"Oh, I mean hae ye any notion of law business, or the like? Could you do a clerk's work? I am thinking ye can, for ye can do anything where your heid's concerned."

"It's at your service as far as it can possibly go, Miss Christy," Esmé said, rising.

"Weel, my dear, ye see I hae just fancied

I wad like to write my will. None o' us know what may be the upshot of sickness, an' I hae been decreeing on whom I'd leave my little worldly gear; if you'll write it out in lawyer language."

"That's not necessary, Miss Christy: I know so much," Esmé replied. "As you have no estate to leave, your 'gear' can be very easily bequeathed in writing to your own dictation."

"Weel, you'll write it: your hand is more decent nor mine to gae before a magistrate when I'm deid."

So Esmé brought her desk and sat down near Miss Christy, who began in a solemn tone.

"Write——an' ye must say amen at the end o' each request, Esmé, for that'll legalise it:—Me, Christy Macpherson, niece o' one James Macpherson o' Phee, and daughter o' Peter Macpherson, late Tacksman o' Kingrassie, leaves an' devises to her uncle the sum o' three hunder pounds in the bank at Braemorin, being the tocher left to her by my mither, Mrs. Janet Logan, and ten pounds, being luck pennies got

by myself on different sales o' the hogs and grimmers last Martinmass. Amen."

"You had better not say that, Miss Christy: it does not make it so distinct," Esmé interposed, in a voice choking with laughter.

"It behoves us to say it. Gae on," responded Miss Christy, with severity. "And the said Christy Macpherson, having no female bluid relation left living in this generation, does bequeath to Miss Norah Mac Neil, eldest daughter o' the laird, all the napery in the blue press and the yellow-papered kist at present in the hoose o' Phee, being her own and her mither the late Mrs. Janet Logan's weaving an' property. An' to Miss Esmé Mac Neil I leave and devise the twal pots o' candied marmalade in said blue press, together wi' my three black horned ewies." Miss Christy here paused for a moment, adding briskly, "An' wad ye like me to pat in my mither's marriage gown to you, Miss Esmé? If I thocht my uncle wad ever take a wife, ye see I wad leave it till her."

"I think it would be better not to mention

it here; but just tell him your wishes about it, Miss Christy: you should give it to your uncle I certainly think!"

"Weel, very weel; gae on." And she resumed her funereal tone. "An' me, Miss Christy Macpherson devises to Miss Ishbel Mac Neil my cairngorm brooch, an' a' the cheeses o' my ain making in the dairy; thegither wi' the picters in my bedroom. An' to the laird himsel' I gie, wi' my blessing, my twal silver spoons an' forks, wi' my china tea-set; an' my whole score o' brown hill stirks an' heifers, thegither with the wool, now at the carding, o' my ain sheep, which I leave to my uncle. This is my bequeathment to the family o' Glenbenrough. Amen.

"An' noo, Esmé, do ye mind yon English Colonel wha was here last autumn? I am thinking I was just rather hard on him yon drive from Glenbenrough to Ben Phee, an' I don't like any one in this world to think grudgingly o' Christy Macpherson. I'll leave a legacy till him for good-will's sake. Write—

An' to one Colonel Sternbotham, o' English name and country, the said deviser o' this Will doth give her best home-spun royal tartan plaid, in memory o' an honourable acquaintance o' him, quhilk Miss Christy Macpherson, on her part, did feel great pleasure in, an' o' a drive, in the which I happed him up in this plaid as now bequeathed.

“An' in like manner she gives and leaves to Mr. Donald Mac Caw, blacksmith and bone-setter in the parish o' Phee, my grandfather's silver watch, in token o' having forgot the cast-out she had wi' him on this melancholy occasion, and in belief o' his gude intentions in treatment o' myself. Amen.

“Put noo, Miss Esmé: P. S.—An' to the servant lass, Jessie Mac Gregor, Miss Christy Macpherson devises all her body claithes.

“Noo, if ye'll hae the great kindness to get a candle (for we canna do it at the lamp), ye'll seal it an' I'll sign it.”

Esmé was glad of the offered escape. She ran out into the frosty moonlight, and, unseen,

unheard, enjoyed the laughter which had been inwardly convulsing her; then she went to the homely, bright little kitchen, and, getting a candle from Jessie, returned, gravely composed, to Miss Christy, and finished the last rites of the Will for her.

From that night Miss Christy's recovery was miraculously rapid; and the day that Esmé left for home again, good Miss Christy accompanied her great part of the way; reclining in a Bath chair, which had been sent from Glenbenrough, and was drawn by the strong servant lass, whose ready feet kept equal pace with Suila's walk. Miss Christy's spirits had been raised, and sustained at their highest pitch, by the sunshine of Esmé's society, which fell brightly and warmly upon her.

In conversing with, amusing, and studying Miss Christy, Esmé exerted part of her intellectual powers; for she had to choose and present those views of the ludicrous, or subjects of interest, which she knew would strike Miss Christy, and bring out, as she desired, the

sympathetic laughter, or remarks, which cheered the heart of the eccentric simple-hearted patient. Esmé delighted her much by reading, at times, passages from Norah's letters; she took a lively interest in all the descriptions of English houses, places, and people, and made characteristic observations on all she heard.

When Miss Christy said goodbye to Esmé upon the road, after many farewell blessings and thanks for her visit, she called her back for a moment and ended with,

“Tell Miss Norah, when you write, that I am near as weel as ever; and (sinking her voice to a whisper) I sent to the merchants yesterday at the cross roads for a bit o' pink; I am going to new dye my silk stockings: I feel certain sure I'll be dancing at her wedding ere the simmer is out. Some English laird will be taking her home, and taking her away again! Oh! but I'll dance my best steps!” and she cracked her fingers merrily.

CHAPTER IV.

WEDDINGS IN PROSPECT.

A' o' my dreams o' warld's guid
Aye were turned wi' thee,
But I leant on a broken reed,
Which soon was ta'en frae me,
Ta'en frae me.

GAELIC.

Oh! hold your tongue o' your weeping,
O' your weeping let me be,
I will show you where the lilies grow
On the banks o' Italie.

SCOTT.

GLENBENROUGH and Ishbel welcomed Esmé back, each with characteristic warmth; and old Cameron, the butler, testified his approbation

of her return by unbiddenly uncorking a bottle of champagne at dinner, and filling the glasses, exultingly nodding with satisfaction when he observed the quiet smile on the laird's honoured face as he proposed, in consequence, the toast of Esmé's health.

The post (which arrived irregularly during the winter months) brought a budget of letters with the dessert. There were, amongst others, two from Norah, and one from Lady Lauriston. Some time ago Norah had written an account of Mr. Marchmoram's triumphant return for Lillsdale, and the brilliant ball given in consequence at Brittonberg Castle, where Lady Ida had moved and looked a queen amongst them all. Harold had led Norah, with protecting arm, through all that magnificent scene (for which he had presented her with an exquisite bouquet). Marchmoram, the hero of it, had looked unhappy—alternately excited and gloomy—and left for London the succeeding day.

The letters received now, arrived after a

long detention, one of seven and the other of five days, on the snowy Highland road. The first contained the routine of her daily life, and of the Lauristons' ever-continued kindness. For weeks past Harold's name had held conspicuous place in Norah's letters: she seemed to meet him constantly, and to see him also very frequently at Fairleigh Hall; but in this his name was scarcely mentioned, and only incidentally. Esmé and Ishbel had scarcely time to silently remark this, when Glenbenrough, who was engaged in reading Lady Lauriston's letter to himself, exclaimed,

"Here is Norah tired of England, after all, and very anxious to come back to us!"

"How, papa?" Esmé said quickly; "she does not say so in her own letter."

"Oh! but read the second; perhaps she does in that. This is what Lady Lauriston says about it, and you see she does not take Norah's views:

“ ‘ Fairleigh Hall, February 23.

‘ MY DEAR GLENBENROUGH,

‘ I write by the same post as Norah, and for the purpose of contradicting her: she actually proposes returning to the Highlands now; most likely to be buried alive in the snow on the road, as the letters received here show there is every chance of, since they arrive irregularly, and sometimes with addresses scarce legible (from their rough carriage on horses’ backs to Perth, I believe). Neither Sir Henry nor I can possibly think of agreeing to it, so I hope you will write and tell her she must leave the date of her departure to us.

‘ Julia has quite agreed to remain with us until you and Sir Alistair should arrive in summer; a plan I had quite looked forward to, as my husband and myself hoped then to swell the returning party to the Highlands.

‘ Pray be very firm in refusing dear Norah’s request, so unkind to us; as, for many reasons,

I should very much regret her departure: Sir Henry and I feel really the affection of parents for her; and her delightful society has been a great pleasure to us this winter.'

"And so on, she continues," added Glenbenrough. "Now why has Norah formed this sudden wish? she could not have been happier, or enjoyed herself more than she has done!" and he looked puzzled.

"This is Norah's second letter, papa. It is short: she does not speak so very anxiously about returning, only proposes it," Esmé replied, as she read aloud the letter addressed to herself.

"Fairleigh Hall, February 23.

"MY DEAREST ESMÉ,

"I think the snow must soon break up in the North. What a very severe winter it has been; how differently the winter affects me here: of course there is infinitely less of it, but I feel it quite differently. At home,

the rarity of the frosty mountain air almost carries one off their feet when out: you know we could not help running races along the road if we tried. But here I feel quite reconciled to keeping within the heated rooms, and taking a drive in the closed carriage after lunch. Do you know that a great home sickness has come over me it has crept on within the last three weeks, and I have now quite a feverish restlessness to return home—to beloved home.

“Never, while I live, shall I forget the very great kindness of both Sir Henry and Lady Lauriston, and the happy, happy time I have spent here. The happiness I have enjoyed throughout last autumn and this winter should serve me in remembrance for a lifetime; but I think my stay in England has been sufficiently protracted. My returning now would not in the least alter the Lauristons’ plans (though they so kindly say so), for Julia will remain, and they will come back to the Highlands when Sir Alistair comes for her,

and then visit both Strathshielie and Glenbenrough. My stay otherwise will be indefinite here, for Lady Lauriston does not wish to leave Yorkshire until summer is advanced.

“Do ask papa to arrange about my return as soon as he can; not that I cease to be happy here, or am tired of England—I never could be either—but I intensely long to go home again.

“We dine at Lady Jane Trevor’s to night. The Duke and Lady Ida are not to be there; they went to London some weeks ago. The Duke is much engaged in these busy public times. Impatiently awaiting papa’s reply, allowing my return to you all,

“Ever your own affectionate

“NORAH.”

“There is one thing certain,” Glenbenrough said, when Esmé had read this aloud, “Norah cannot get North at present, while the Highland road is still blocked up: I would not allow her to attempt it; and when the snow

melts, the rivers will overflow and make it dangerous. At present, and for some weeks to come, she must remain quiet."

"Norah would have enjoyed so much your going for her; I wonder she thinks of giving it up," Ishbel added.

"Yes, this desire of change is not at all like Norah: I can't understand it," Glenbenrough replied thoughtfully. "I hope she feels well, or has had no secret annoyance there. I must write to herself when I answer Lady Lauriston's most kind letter: I can't understand it."

But Esmé understood it, and she felt impatient to retreat to her own room, where she might quietly read a little missive that had been inclosed in Norah's last letter, and bore the word "Private" on the outside.

She read it, and read it again: it told her why she wished to return to the wintry solitude of her Highland home. Norah's disappointed heart rebelled now against the placid scenes and luxurious society of fair England's

coming spring. In search of sisterly sympathy, she wrote openly, fully, of past and present hope and grief, and met the inquiring eyes of Esmé with unreserve sufficient even to satisfy her. Why should not Norah write of Harold? There need be no suppression of feeling on her part, for his had flowed openly and freely towards her in the eyes of the world: no conflicting tide, or outward storm, had ruffled the settled clear calm depth of his and Norah's sympathetic characters. It was evident that the current of Norah's happiness had received a sudden check; but by what, or by whom, it had been turned from her, she knew not. Thus she confided her secret heart to Esmé:

“MY OWN DEAR SISTER,

“Let me write you all I feel and think, for 'tis time I did so, and 'tis relief to me: when we meet, I will explain all, and seek your sympathy more fully. I only know now that I feel very wretched, and am longing to be back to the quiet peace of home: I crave

for the bracing open air of the hills. Oh, dear Esmé! I have never written to you of my daily increasing happiness here; my heart was too full of it then to give vent; but now that I see it vanishing—driven cruelly from me—I must tell you, and claim your sympathy.

“You know well what my feelings are; but, indeed, they have scarcely given due return to those precious, dearly-prized ones shown of late more and more plainly to me. Indeed, indeed I believed, and allowed myself to believe, that he loved me: could I doubt it? By every look, word, and attention, he has given me to understand it. We have of late been almost inseparable; and Lady Lauriston at last even forced me to give her my confidence: she said it was only confidence she wanted from me, so that we might commune as sisters together (and she is indeed, and has been, as a sister to me) for that outward proofs of our attachment had long since been visible to both her and Sir Henry: it was impossible to doubt the feelings that existed on his part,

for they were shown so clearly. Oh! the hours, the days, that I have passed, dearest Esmé! I was too happy. Earth held too great bliss for me: my unworthy, wretched self never deserved to receive such at God's hands.

"I only want to get home: while I am here I cannot recover myself. I cannot believe—will not think—of all being over; and yet I am sure it is: I can't stay here in this uncertainty. If he still loves me, he will seek me there; if not, let me be away from the chance of meeting him with changed feelings.

"I can't yet feel coherently, or at all conjecture what took him away from me: it was three weeks ago on Monday. I was at the rectory, and he came too: he was the previous evening at Fairleigh, and he spent it by my side. He talked of the coming spring, of the first opening flowers at Harold's Hall, and of many, many things I can't write here: he spoke of hope and future happiness, of his love for the Highlands, and the fortunate fate

which had sent him there last year, to find that which all his travels and all England had never shown to him before.

“We were in the green-house at Mr. Lee’s next day, and sat down amongst the perfume of the flowers; and again he spoke to me. Oh, Esmé! in words of ecstasy, so true, so earnest, so simple: and, though you know my reserve, I am certain that he felt—he knew what lay beneath it.

“Mrs. Lee had come into the green-house, and he then altered his tone and talked to me (as he often did) of business and his own affairs. He spoke of Lady Ida, and told me she had written to him lately from London: he said she was very anxious to stir him up to go into Parliament, and he thought he would do so, later. He said he admired her talent, but her’s was a character that never could influence his, he thought; because he knew it so well: it was so utterly unloveable. Well, a few minutes after this, a servant appeared with a letter, and said a groom had brought

it from Harold's Hall, and was in waiting. Basil opened it, and, while he was reading, I had risen and begun plucking the dead leaves off an Arum lily. When I turned again, he had risen too: he looked pale, and with a startlingly perturbed expression. He went out: a few moments after he returned, and, saying his horse was in readiness, bade good-bye to Mrs. Lee and myself, and rode away.

“From that hour to this I have never heard of him again, save indirectly; and that which I have heard shows me I had miserably deceived myself: his acquaintance with me, after all, has been but one of friendship! But what else had I right to think of, or expect? I am too quiet to arouse love: I have not the power of fascination; I am merely the calm, the steady friend. Oh, Esmé! yet my imagination could revel in fancied sympathy of myself with Basil Harold. I thought the cup of earthly happiness had found its way, as so rarely happens, unadulterated to my lips, and that I might sip and sustain my life in it now

to the end: but I deserved it not, and God has withdrawn it from me.

“Lady Lauriston sent to Harold’s Hall, two days after his departure, for some plants she wished, along with a note of invitation; but it was returned, with a message that Mr. Harold had gone to London, and the date of his return was unknown. Well, then we heard he was staying at the Duke of Brittonberg’s, in town, and that he and Lady Ida were inseparable; and the day before yesterday I heard that he was going abroad: he might possibly come down for a day to Harold’s Hall, to give some directions, but it was not likely.

“And so, dear Esmé, let me come home. Lady Ida has found the way to influence him, though he thought she could not: now let me get away, so that she may hear it, and see that the Highland girl can be as proud as herself. *I* will seek no melting interview—have no fond farewell.

“Ever your loving, though unhappy,

“NORAH.”

Glenbenrough wrote next day to Lady Lauriston, and also to Norah; telling the former that he left his daughter quite to her care and wishes, and worded his note with all the true old-fashioned polish of his cordial and courteous nature. He told her that even Norah's immediate return would not allow him to deny himself the pleasure of escorting her and Sir Henry through Scotland later, and that, though he did not go to England, he would stand on the border to welcome them into his own country. And then (not to counteract or prevent Norah's desire of returning home at once, should she still persevere in it) he told her that he might go to Edinburgh on business, by-and-bye, when the Highland road was opened; and that if he thought his detention would be long there, perhaps it would be advisable that Norah's happy visit should give place to the duty of returning to Glenbenrough, where Esmé and Ishbel, being left alone, would daily miss and long for her society.

This latter opening of escape, without giving offence to Lady Lauriston's kind hospitality, he also held out to Norah; and she certainly, under any circumstances, could not sooner leave England. Within a fortnight Glenbenrough hoped to be at Edinburgh; and, if she then still desired it, he would send Cameron, the old butler, to bring her home.

The day succeeding that on which Harold had sat in Mr. Lee's little greenhouse with Norah, he sat in a different room and with a different person. The refreshing coolness and exquisite natural serenity there were changed for a gorgeous, heated boudoir, large enough to admit of the hasty transit, to and fro, of a flushed and angry woman. Lady Ida, dressed in splendid wintry fashion, paced up and down before him in the Duke's town house: she had sent for him as the only man or friend then living to whom she could apply for words of sympathy or advice in her present trouble. Harold was the only being in the world from whom her proud nature would

stoop to take so much of the former gift as it, in its hardness, could ever be brought to desire.

With flashing eyes and arched neck, Lady Ida spoke, declaiming occasionally with a graceful haughty gesture of her jewelled hand.

“Basil! Basil! I must prevent it: it shall not be! Shall I allow it? Never, while my will can work, or my tongue plead! Wretched woman! let her take care: I’ll crush her beneath my feet—I’ll crush her!” and she set her white teeth and pressed her foot firmer as she walked.

Harold was very grave and pale: his face wore an expression of deep annoyance.

“Dear Ida, I feel for you with my soul.”

“Yes, *you* may, *you* may; but, Basil—oh, my God! the world’s sympathy. Shall I be brought under it?—This woman, this woman! know you what she is? Dangerous reptile! I took her up for my own purposes, and held her, as I thought, by the terror of my eye;

but she slipped further than I knew. And now let her gain entrance, and she will not lie in sleepy luxury in the warmth below, but, like the venomous adder no longer torpid, will ever strive higher up until she climb into the eyries; then must the young birds fly while she sucks to death the older dotard eagle. Then, then must I fly and whither? Oh! Basil, how can I stoop from my height?"

"Ida, be resolute as you can be; only use tact, and try more gentleness with the Duke: be wary, for the danger is very imminent. You must be firm, courageous, but cool: his temper may strike sudden fire against your own, and he may rush upon the act in irate contradiction; then all would be over with you. You never can undo the mischief, and dare not bring him to repentance by revenge: it demands all your qualities of head and heart, to work steadily and carefully on. Do not mar the crisis by lack of judgment, which would not be wanting in any one of your minor projects."

“No, Basil,” Lady Ida replied, her lip trembling; “but the very strongest passions of my disposition rise banded here: the impulse of my hate carries me away. This miserable, low-minded woman threatens to wreck the mental plans and work of years.”

“She is a bad, a detestable woman! I know it; and every faculty I possess shall aid you in preventing, if possible, the marriage, dear Ida,” Harold said, with determination. “I cannot but think that a direct appeal to the Duke, temperately, carefully urged, may carry conviction. Go to him, as his loving and only daughter; speak gently, affectionately: tell him your conviction that this match is neither for his nor your happiness: exert your own powers of calm reasoning. Point out, if you will, the object of this designing, grasping character, which has so insidiously wound its way: paint Lady Jane as you know her, and as you believe her to be—incapable of adding an hour’s happiness to his life, and repugnant in every respect to yourself. Speak to him kindly,

though with firmness." Lady Ida laughed bitterly.

"I fear 'tis too late to go with gentle words to the Duke now, Basil. When first I knew of it, I acted on impulse; because, as I told you, I had not preparation enough to steel myself with the courage of calmness: nature gave way, and my agony broke forth in a sudden fury. I rushed to my father, and, with bitter and frantic words, I upbraided, taunted, even threatened him! Aye, I told him he would do it at his peril. I told him that never would Lady Ida Beauregard stand second to this Lady Jane Trevor; that if he placed her above me, I would rise in defiance of him and her; choose what instrument I would, and act in opposition to him and her as long as I lived."

Nothing could be more terribly suggestive than Lady Ida's whole attitude and bearing as she uttered these words: her face paled with the intensity of her emotion, and her tall thin figure stood erect in its full towering height.

“Yes, Basil, I reminded him with bitterness of all the years of my early youth, when he, in his selfish egotism, sought forgetfulness of my mother in neglect of me; how, unassisted and alone as I may say, my childish character was left to its own natural dictates; and how, when time fitted it, I returned to him good for the evil.

“In a dutiful spirit, I gave my young womanhood to that thorny path of political, worldly, ambitious life in which he trod and lived. I diverted my tastes to suit his; I sharpened my woman’s wit to gain victory over rival men for him; I steeled my heart, became cold and calculating, and sacrificed all tenderer feeling, in the belief that, if I remained thus true to him, he would be satisfied with me. And now, selfish—basely selfish—weak, too—he makes me this return. He seeks to separate himself from me by taking to himself one of the meanest instruments I sought and used in furtherance of my schemes for him. He robs me of the position for

which I have relinquished all else. Am I not wronged?"

"Yes, Ida," Harold replied. "But had you described temperately to the Duke the character of this scheming woman, and used argument against this union—had you shown him the love of a daughter anxious for his happiness, as well as to become sole possessor of his rank and protection, it would have touched his heart; whereas the irritation excited by your reproaches might rouse him into rebellion. Had you not, Ida, sent to me on this emergency, I should have been here to speak to you on a matter touching my own happiness," and Harold's voice, which had been firm before, became slightly faltering.

"What is this, Basil?" asked Lady Ida, her eyes resting steadily on his ingenuous face.

"My own marriage."

"To whom?"

"To Norah Mac Neil. I admired her the first day I saw her in her Highland home: I have loved her for months, and I expect she

will bring life-long happiness to my English home."

Lady Ida frowned; but ere she could reply, Harold resumed.

"She possesses high principle: she has a fine mind, and a pure and truthful nature; and though she is free from all taint of worldliness, yet she has wit enough to meet it in others: aye, not even Lady Jane Trevor could conquer her."

"Ah! I always feared he would marry thus," thought Lady Ida.

"You will learn to be proud of her, Ida," he continued. "I intended having a conversation with your father on my marriage, he having been my guardian, and until this and other matters were arranged, I determined not to ask Norah to be my wife. I will go to him now, and will try to lead the conversation to the subject that agitates you. I also hope, as you do, that we may prevent his marrying this woman."

"I fear not," Lady Ida said, in her low

deep tone, as her cousin left the room. She went up to the windows looking out upon the square, and angrily drew down the blinds; the light annoyed her: she preferred the twilight, for moody thoughts were coming on. She sat down and leaned her sharply-cut chin upon her hand, and muttered her thoughts aloud in broken sentences.

“And if he does—if he does, shall I marry too? I will follow him just so far, to prove my superiority in making my choice. I will choose well. Mine ~~will~~ be a masculine, healthy, vigorous character—a strong growing tree, sure to thrive and spread its branches, aye, till it overshadow—— I will show him that when I stoop it is for a purpose; I bend to grasp that which will bring increased force to me. But I will not yet make up my mind,” she continued with bitterness. “Marriage—marriage for Ida Beauregard? But for this curse which threatens to blight my prospects, I never would bind myself with that tie! My power has long been felt by Godfrey Marchmoram, and I could

have held it over him—have led him on and made him work with and for me—compelled him, by false hopes and feigned disdain, to follow me and dedicate his life to me: but marriage! marriage! no—I am not formed for it. Inclination—what is that with me? Oh! how little can the world judge the past or present of us. What shall I do if this blow fall upon me? Oh cruel, crushing fatality: if he marry her, I am driven forth!”

She remained still and motionless as a statue: the marble rigidity of her posture, and the cold determination of her look, marked the truth of her words. Those arms seemed as if they could not clasp in passionate embrace child or husband; those eyes, as if they could not overflow with tenderness, or those lips utter words of fondness.

In another part of London, and in a room as luxurious as this in which Lady Ida so gloomily meditated, but furnished to suit different tastes, two men sat in easy conversation.

Marchmoram looked older than he did some months before; his strong marked face lacked the glow of Highland exercise, and the strain of the mental faculties in political warfare left traces of fatigue, which no mere physical exertion would have caused: he looked jaded and fagged. His eyes burned bright, but the light was lurid, and the brow was contracted: continued late hours and constant working of the brain had told upon his iron frame.

Auber was as unchanged as if but an hour had passed since the early October sun had last shone on his parting smile at Glenbenrough: his face had acquired that quiet, yet bland, expression which is the result of a combination of even temper and intellectual complacency, and the *blasé* accomplished man of thirty-six looked rather worn-out. His enjoyment of the world was tempered by thorough knowledge of it; he felt weariness after an evening spent in its most delightful society: but his was epicurean philosophy, not carking, life-destroying cynicism.

“Well, Godfrey, defend me from an Italian mistress! I don’t know what to do: can you not help me, man? I hate her!”

“I never heard how she followed you back, this time, from Rome,” Marchmoram replied, almost absently.

“How can I tell you that? I wish I could, that I might lay my plans better another time. I left her there myself, under the charge of Father Iago, who ought to have been a match for her in cunning. But not a month after I left Rome, while sitting on the low garden wall at Cintra, smoking, a pair of flaming eyes shot out a burning glance upon me. I was startled, fascinated: the sweat stood upon my brow — every nerve in my body thrilled. I sprung to my feet and uttered an imprecation; the sudden impulse made it so strong, Godfrey,” (here Auber gave a half-amused smile), “that it saved me: the glance was not repeated, and the face disappeared. I walked on to the hotel, but a weight, as of lead, was upon me. How was I to get rid of this fiend? I felt assured

she was dogging me in the darkness, then. It struck me that, being in that strange country, I might be able to frighten her. I turned, and, knowing she was behind, went by a circuitous route to the house of the chief of the police, whom I brought back with me near to the spot of her first ambush. Then, speaking distinctly enough for her quick ears to hear, and in French (which she understands), I told him there was a woman watching me, whom I should require to have arrested on a charge that I would make when she was in custody. I gave him a minute description of her, and directed him to look out for her and discover her abode; then, lowering my voice, I told him I wished her conveyed to Lisbon, and offered him a large reward, giving him a sum on the spot.

“I knew she would believe that the gold-fed hounds would seize her unless she fled; and I got rid of her. I never met those glaring eyes again until last week: now she is here. How am I to get rid of her? her cleverness and

tact are wonderful. A horrible feeling comes over me sometimes, that I shall never be able to escape her: her jealous infatuation amounts to insanity. No man could torment a woman, as a woman like this can torment a man. There seems only one way open to me."

"Is that marriage, Herbert?" Marchmoram asked, looking at his friend with a searching scrutiny, not quite agreeable. "I think if you married, she would cease to molest you."

"Aye, perhaps," Auber replied; "but, to tell truth, my inclination does not lie that way. Though were I to marry, I think she would poison me sooner than let me escape her."

"A thought strikes me," said Marchmoram. "Harold's valet, Gupini, is about as clever a fellow as I ever met, and will do anything for money: could you not get him to take her abroad, and pension him as long as he keeps her away from you?"

"Not a bad idea, Godfrey: but she would stiletto him." He was silent for a moment,

then added, "Well, if I can arrange with Gupini satisfactorily, and he manages to keep her away, all will be well."

CHAPTER V.

A HIGHLAND WEDDING.

Mark yonder pomp of costly fashion,
Round the wealthy titled bride;
But when compared with real passion,
Poor is all the princely pride.

BURNS.

“Beneath his darkened brow the smile
Of pleased revenge with hatred strove.”

THERE had been anxiety at Glenbenrough about Normal Mac Alistair, and during the last fortnight letters of inquiry and reply had passed constantly between it and Arduashien. Normal had been ill nigh unto death; for

many weeks he lay as in a trance, and, though his mind had returned, the exhaustion kept him prostrate. He had been seized with fever first, in a desolate, homeless spot enough—a reed-thatched hut, on swampy ground, amongst the wooded hills along the Spanish coast.

Normal had gone on a shooting expedition with a few native guides, and had settled himself for a time amongst the woody valleys there. But the robust constitution that succumbed to no fatigue on Highland hills, and defied with impunity the Northern heat and the Northern blast, was struck down in a night here. A long day's overheated walk, and a sleep in the moonlight on the cool flowery edge of a poisonous marsh, brought on a violent fever. Normal awoke with a sense of darkness all around and within. He was scarcely conscious when they lifted him up, and bore him to the rugged shelter of his hut; and there he might have lain and died, still unconscious, but for the sympathy of his sturdy followers. They rolled him in his High-

land plaid, and carried him down to the sea port, where he found a friend in the English consul, who received him into his house.

He was well nursed, and as he slowly recovered, his father and friends learnt that it was mostly owing to the tender care of the consul's only daughter. When he had arrived there a short time before, in full health and strength, her admiration and curiosity had been excited; but the stalwart young Scotchman had shown indifference: he seemed wholly absorbed in his sporting pursuits. But now he was thrown helpless at her feet. She had suddenly become the sustainer of his strength: her presence was the sunshine of his life. She saw a smile on his lip as she spoke; his eye met her's, and his sunburnt cheek flushed as she sang to him, in a sweet low voice, well-remembered English ballads. But she knew not of his far-off Highland home at Arduashien, and that Normal only traced in her gentle and graceful tendance of him, a resemblance to the dark-eyed earnest Norah, who was to him as a

sister. In Normal's letters—for he was able now to write short bulletins to his father—he spoke constantly of his debt of gratitude to the consul's daughter; and in the last letter which Glenbenrough received from Arduashien, the old laird wrote thus:—

“So convinced are his mother and myself that the precious life of our Normal has been mainly saved to us through the devoted care of this dear young lady, that we have joined in a letter giving our free consent to his future marriage with her, should that be desirable to both. We felt that in thus forestalling a request very likely on his part to be made, we were only marking our own sense of her deserving worth and conduct. She will prove an admirable wife for our son. I don't know if I told you that the consul is a cadet of the elder branch of the Welch Penryn Tremyn family, and consequently Miss Penryn is related to the Tremyns of Troy, who married into the families of Couchfern and Thistlebank in the last century; and she is thus a cousin also of

Penryn of Pree, the present M.P. for Brecon, and of other as ancient families."

What thought Esmé of this? Many uncomfortable and unanalysed feelings tormented her. "What right had this girl," she thought, "to assume the exclusive nursing of Normal? and how had she succeeded in pleasing him? Did she understand his character? Was there piquancy in his reserve even to her? Had his nature unfolded under that hot Southern sun?" Esmé wished for the power of invisibility for a time. She hated this letter of old Arduashien, and then she hated herself. She did not mention to Florh the contents of this letter from Normal's father; neither did Ishbel, whom also it pleased not.

At Glenbenrough spring was advancing with its tenderest colours and most delicate perfumes: the snow had retreated to its everlasting bed in the hollows upon the highest hills, and lay there in defiance of the strengthening sunshine and soft spring breezes, at whose approach the glens and vales beneath gladdened in bright

verdurous welcome, the grass springing up freshly above the wintry weather-beaten heather, and the waving tendrils of larch and birch hanging out their buds and tassels. The meadows clothed themselves in gorgeous gold, from the rich braes and banks of whin, glowing with colour, and diffusing peach-like perfume for miles around, to the little paly primroses, carpetting every wood and garlanding the roots of the yet thin-leaved trees. The very rocks, bleached by the winter snow, shone brightly in silver grey in the early summer sun.

It was a time of expectation, without as well as within. Esmé and Ishbel marked impatiently the opening garden flowers and orchard blossoms; they wished all Glenbenrough to be decked in bridal unison, for Norah was soon expected home, and her marriage was there to take place. Their father had gone to England for her, and soon after her return Harold was to follow with other English friends. They would have triumphal arches of dark green

pine and holly, gracefully festooned with deer's-grass, to welcome them.

A marriage had not taken place within the old walls of Glenbenrough for nearly a century. The present laird, and his father and grandfather before him, were only sons, without sisters, and had been made bridegrooms at other homes; and for long had the old people of the place looked forward to the day when one of the young daughters of the present Glenbenrough would have a braw wedding night. Alas! there was no son to go elsewhere for his wife, and the name of Mac Neil of Glenbenrough was nigh becoming extinct.

Norah wrote thus of her marriage:—

“Fairleigh, May 28th.

“MY DEAREST ESMÉ AND ISHBEL,

“At last the day is fixed, and papa and I leave this on the 6th, and, travelling through, hope to be home by the 11th. Sir Henry and dear Lady Lauriston follow with Julia on the 20th, and thus will be with us for nearly a

fortnight before the day. Basil will come as soon as possible after them. In the meantime he is here, within my own loving sight, and he comes up as far as London with us on the 6th, where he will be as busy as we will be at Glenbenrough.

“Do you know I feel as if, were some dreadful accident to happen to papa and me on the Highland road, it would only be natural (as far as I am concerned), for my present happiness is too bright. The only thing I can do is to try and keep my mind steadied by the deep and earnest gratitude which fills it; and under which, if sustained, both Basil and I may safely love, and increase each other’s happiness to the end.

“Many arrangements for room will require to be made at Glenbenrough. I am glad Lady Ida Beauregard does not come, for we could not have given her suitable accommodation. Basil says she would have come, but some domestic matters (about which he himself is much annoyed) will keep her in London. You

will be glad to hear she has written me a kind little note, and has sent me an exquisite bracelet: the Duke giving me a necklace to suit. Basil's cousins, Lord Darnton and Sir Edward Cressingham, are coming to Dreumah. Mr. Auber is expected also; but Mr. Marchmoram's arrival will be uncertain to the last, as it depends on some parliamentary motion expected to come on at that time. I hope Florh is glad about my marriage.

“Dearest sisters, I hear Basil's voice in the garden, so I can write no more: I must go out.

“Ever your affectionate and happy

“NORAH.”

Norah came home with her father, and for a fortnight the three sisters were together almost inseparably. They climbed all the old well-beloved hills, rowed and bathed in the bright beautiful river, gathered deer's-grass and holly on the Roua Pass and the garden banks, and, mounted on their ponies, they rode to

some of the very furthest glens, where Norah said good-bye in every cottage to her father's people. Not one of the old time-worn women, or smiling hard-labouring young ones, scattered over scores of heathery miles, but received a parting gift. All the near and far distant "merchants" also blessed Miss Mac Neil's generosity, for it emptied their different small shops of long-piled heaps of woollen stuff, groceries, ribbons, and brought a large margin to that year's gains and profits.

Florh came from Lochandhu, and took up her abode at Glenbenrough, her cottage being in the meantime shut up, as Ewen also was sent for. His mother rejoiced at the occupation now given him in many of the preparations for Norah's coming wedding. It was his part to go to Arduashien and Strathshielie for various assistance required; to superintend the arrangement of the barns into dormitories for the distant tenants, who were all sure to come; and to see as to the correct pitching of the tents on the lawn.

Ewen had been a trial to Florh all winter. He refused to arouse, after his brother's death, to any useful occupation; but sat in daily increasing gloomy despondency by the fire-side, engaged in some mere indolent sedentary way—polishing Normal's fire-arms, or dressing trout and salmon flies: and, even when the time for tillage of their small arable croft came on, he lent to Florh but a grudging helping hand in her labours on it. Now, however, he had to exert himself in the general pleasant excitement at Glenbenrough; and Florh secretly looked forward to a further distraction, which she hoped would, like some sudden severe operation, cure his disease by removing at once, and for ever, the cause of it.

As long as Jeanie Cameron lived, Ewen's morbid interest in his blighted hopes and love would continue to exist, along with other sore and galling feelings; but the poor girl seemed likely soon to be removed from earth. She had returned to her father's home not many weeks ago, after an absence during the winter

and spring ; and people at the kirk told Florh she was dying : she was thin, wasted, and had “a wrastlin’ cough,” and the “streekit look” was upon her whitened lips.

A stern sense of expediency hardened Florh’s character, as surely as it does that of all whom it may influence : she thought it would be best if Jeanie died. Ewen would fret sore, and then recover : there would be no more fuel for hope or for hatred. He must ever remain in ignorance of the true cause of the last estrangement ’twixt him and her ; and in her grave all the past would be buried. Believing this, she listened almost with pleasure, when, a week before Norah’s marriage-day, her son called her out to speak to him in the birch wood at the back of Glenbenrough. He had that afternoon returned from Dreumah, where he had been sent for the shooting tent.

“Oh ! mother,” and Florh saw the unusual tear quiver in his cold grey eye, “I hae na mentioned her name to ye this year ; but I must do it now, for likely one o’ the last o’

times. I was hot wi' the weight o' the tent ropes I was carrying the day, and I stepped down to take a drink from the spring 'mang the ferns near her father's house, when I came sudden on her. She was sitting there, an' I minded the last day I saw her there before last Martinmas, when I gave her such hard words, and cast up yon English fine gentleman. She could na hae answered me to-day as then, had she wished it, mother: her face was as wan as one o' the lilies on Lochandhu, and her eyes were as deadly bright as a dying hawk's; her voice came low and weak, and fitful as the scarce-stirring wind. Oh, mother, I was ahint her, and heard my own name: she said it sighing like to break her heart. 'Oh, Ewen! the evil one sent a glamour o'er me. Oh, my ain auld faithfu' laddie! would ye but forgie me ere I dee?' I don't know how I turned my steps backward; but I did. She didna see me, an' I was feared, had I come forward, I would greet, so I moved on, an' left her there in her loneliness."

“Aye, aye, my son,” Florh replied, in a compassionate tone; “puir lassie, puir lassie! When she is deid, ye maun bear it as the wark o’ Providence, an’ seek no to meddle in his decrees. It was aye intended ye and she should never make out your contract, otherwise she wad na be this way noo. Ye’ll see she’ll tell yoursel’ to forgie her, and let her die in peace, and mak ye promise to live in peace for her sake: I know she will; an’ she’ll leave this desire as a legacie for your soul’s good. Whenever Miss Norah’s wedding is over I’ll gae to Jeanie Cameron; an’ then ye’ll come later, maybe, an’ see her too, an’ tak her last words from hersel’.”

“That’ll depend on what she will hae to tell me,” Ewen gloomily replied, wiping his brow with his bonnet. “I’ll let her die in peace, my puir lassie: but if I hear I hae more to forgie than hersel’—if she’ll ask me to forgie any one that has wronged her and me—mother, I’ll no! I’ll never, never do it! I’ll no tell *her*, but I tell it *you*: if I find I

hae cause for it, the day o' her death will set me on my revenge."

"Ye hae nae cause for it, Ewen," Florh replied sternly, a curious twinkling look lighting up her mouth and eyes. "Ye'll find Jeanie will have no one to blame but hersel'. I'll take care that to you, at any rate, she won't," she mentally added.

Ewen made no further remark, but walked away to his usual duties.

The night before the wedding, Harold and Norah stood together on the old hall doorsteps. The July moon rested large, soft, and silvery above the Roua Pass, lighting up the silent triumphal flower arches and leafy canopies of myrtle-green which spanned the way from the house to the bridge, and showing the outlines of the piles of wood for bonfires, ready to burst to-morrow into pyramids of flame on every rocky height: and, as their eyes wandered from scene to scene, always returning to each other, the peaceful moonlight mingled with the sunshine of their hope, and shed

exquisite happiness through their hearts. There was beauty without, within, and spreading brightly before them.

It was time for Harold to go: his horse had long been waiting to carry him from his bride's sight (according to Scottish etiquette) until they met next day to part no more. He was to sleep at Dreumah, where most of his English friends were expected that day.

Norah and the sisters walked slowly with him towards the silvery quivering river; his horse stood impatient on the other side. Ishbel called out as he looked back, ere the bridge was gained,

"Ah well, Basil, though Norah won't see the lovely bonfires here to-morrow, she is going to see a much grander one. If I thought I could go post-haste to Mount Vesuvius, as she will, I would give up the sight here too."

Harold turned back to retort, glad of the excuse thus given him, and the opportunity of a few more parting words with Norah.

"I really believe I forgot to tell you, dearest,

that my old valet, Gupini, is to return to me; but in capacity of courier: and invaluable, indeed, he will be in the latter capacity. I got a letter from him, dated from Naples, about a fortnight ago, saying he had heard of my intended marriage, and offering to return; so, knowing of what service he would be abroad, I accepted his offer. He was to arrive at Dreumah to-night, I think; and if you remember to ask him to-morrow, Ishbel, he will tell you whether Vesuvius is worth looking at just now."

Again good night, and Harold rode lingeringly away.

So large an assemblage of Highland friends had been invited, that Glenbenrough knew the drawing-room would not contain them all; it was therefore arranged that the marriage should take place in the open air, upon the heather-scented lawn, over which an awning was stretched, extending along the river bank: there two hundred guests were to drink the bridal toast with Highland honours.

It was to be a Highland wedding, with festivities before, during the ceremony, and after it. Lady Lauriston, and Lady Mac Neil and her daughters, had been there for a week, exercising their taste and fancy in all the arrangements, and Harold and Norah had themselves gathered many branches from the blossoming trees, and had loaded baskets with fruit and flowers for the joyful occasion.

The marriage ceremony was to take place at four o'clock in the afternoon, as by that hour the heat of the summer sun would have abated. Soon after two, the ponderous old family carriages of distant guests began to arrive. First came Normal's father and mother, Mr. and Mrs. Mac Alistair of Arduashien, whose appearance at a festivity was as rare as such an event as the present had hitherto been at Glenbenrough; but the happiness of Normal's recovery had been an additional stimulus towards this exertion. (Arduashien told Glenbenrough he had as yet received no reply to his important letter). Then came Sir Roderick

and Lady Glenmardie, with a piper playing on the roof of the carriage; then the Couchferns, young Couchfern, with his brilliant handsome face and Highland dress, doing honour to the day; then a row of dog-carts filled with kilted men, all sons of the lairds who were following more staidly with their wives; then, in her carriage, in the wake of the dog-carts filled with her fancied admirers, Mrs. Grant of Seatoune, reclining in stiff-laced agony, with galling tight white satin shoes, and a heap of finery on the top of her wig.

The people from the different districts flocked in bands, headed each by the local piper. From the Dual Ghu, from Phee, and from every distant part of the property, they came; their approach was indeed a striking sight. The procession came by the Roua Pass, and was augmented by the people of Lochandhu, the strains of the bagpipe announcing them while still far off. First marched the piper, with quick steps, with his flying ribbons and inflated face; along the perilous edge of the

narrow pass, keeping time with his inspiring strains, he led the single endless file. On they came, with erect heads, pressing so close upon each other, that one tripping against the other would have sent them all, like a pack of cards upon their faces, headlong into the abyss; but they knew neither fear nor danger, though many of the spectators gazed in breathless suspense until the last of the file had passed the peril, and came safely down the hill. Not a man had thought of the precipice; every foot kept time to the stirring tones of the beloved music.

Suddenly a general excitement spread through the numerous company on the lawn, and burst forth in a deafening cheer, echoed from height to height, as the dust of the rapidly approaching carriage, and the combined bands of pipers treading past to the welcome, announced that the bridegroom and his friends were in sight.

All rushed confusedly through Esmé's brain as she stood midst the fair bridesmaid group on the hall door-step, and she grasped the cold iron

of the balustrade for support, as she thought she saw Marchmoram's figure next to Harold's. Ishbel saw the anxious suspense, the earnest expectant gaze, and whispered in sisterly love,

"Esmé, he is not there; be composed: here is Mr. Auber coming."

And at the same moment the latter, separating from the augmenting crowd around Harold, advanced to where his practised eye had marked, almost from the bridge, the lovely girlish cluster.

As Auber's voice, in polished greeting, fell upon Esmé's ear, and her eyes met the well-known shadowy gaze of his, almost as last she had met it, she felt that he alone had returned; and, at the sudden reaction, the hot blood mounted almost to her temples: her emotion betrayed itself in the alternate bright colour and deadly paleness of her cheek, until an inner prayer for controlling strength sent it quieted at last back to her heart.

Auber had seen it all, and noted every phase of her confusion, save its cause. That

he interpreted, confidently, but mistakenly. The knowledge of her love for him, the fresh touch of her cool little hand, the unchanged, or rather improved, aspect of her beauty, the quickly-formed vista of a delightful freshening summer and autumn, all touched with revivifying power the *blasé* man: a smile almost natural, a sense of pleasure, keener than for years had stimulated him, lit up his dark face.

And now, leaning with drooping head upon her father's shoulder, the bride makes her exit for ever from her maiden home. Where on earth could there be a prettier scene than that? Nature lent her grandest frame to the animated picture, and the glorious July sun sent its deep glow to soften and enhance the beauties of the scene.

Midst silence unbroken, save by the rushing of the unheeding river, and beneath the golden sunshine, the Highland girl and her English bridegroom stood, whilst the clergyman, in the simplicity of the Presbyterian form, proceeded to make them one. His uncouth figure, in its

plain canonicals, and his loud sonorous accents, heightened, by contrast, the graceful elegance of Norah's slight figure, richly veiled in its bridal lace, as she bent low to listen to his address ; while Harold, with his finely-chiselled face and upright manly dignity, looked a fit support for so fair a creature. Norah's wreath and bouquet were of rare but perishable beauty : that very morning had the natural orange-flower and myrtle arrived from Harold's Hall, under care of a special messenger ; and the sprig of white heather which Harold bore, had been gathered by Norah's self that very morning on the Roua Pass.

To the English people present the marriage ceremony was imposing from its primitive simplicity. They saw the clergyman address the bride with fatherly earnestness, setting before her the duties of the holy state ; and then turn to the bold bridegroom, and exhort him to love and protect his wife. With a firm grasp he next joined their hands, and announced them to be now, with his blessing and their

own consent, a married pair. Then, releasing their hands, he retreated a step, and with closed eyes poured forth a prayer in low pleading tones; his eloquence and feeling impressing the reverent listeners, as he addressed every state and condition there. At last he paused and gave his blessing to the bridal pair, and then, his sacred functions fulfilled, shaking hands with blithe good will, he suddenly became a layman. The ceremony was over, and rejoicing commenced.

A brilliant *déjeuner* was laid out under the long green-leaved awning, and the company comprised all the Highland gentry for many miles round; except the Miss Rankins, who would most likely have honoured Norah's marriage under its desirable circumstances, had they not been at the moment vainly attempting to gain equally eligible establishments for themselves in the high circles of London. Not a guest was there who did not heartily sympathise in the events of the day, and who turned not in pleasure from Norah's lovely countenance

to the mellow autumnal face of her father, telling for itself the history of his long untarnished life. His generous friendship, his many acts of kindness, had won for the honourable open-hearted laird of Glenbenrough the esteem of his equals and the love of the poor. Many were the enthusiastic toasts, given in sparkling language, and drunk in frothing champagne, to the continued prosperity of his roof-tree; many the polished compliments paid to the charms of his remaining daughters; and, towards the close of the entertainment, not a few hints were thrown out in broad accented Scotch, or more fortunately unintelligible Gaelic—from the lower end of the tables, where substantial farmers sat—of the hopes of some future grandson taking the name and bearing it on in all the time-honoured associations of Mac Neil!

In the grand final toast of “the health of Mr. and Mrs. Harold,” all the glasses were dashed to the ground in true Celtic fashion. Many of the country people obstinately declined

giving the bridegroom his prefix ; as, if a laird, why not “Harold” ?

Esmé sat next to Lord Darnton, he as “best man” having led her to the feast: this added to her enjoyment, for in some nameless manner he reminded her of Marchmoram, for whom she had at first mistaken him ; and, knowing that this sympathy was unknown to him, she enjoyed it unrestrainedly. She talked to him in her own style, as she had done in her first unfettered intercourse with Marchmoram : and Lord Darnton met her almost as he had done.

The style of conversation of these men of the world suited Esmé ; she never had enjoyed the delight of converse with well-read, travelled, and conversible men of her own country. The intellectual qualities of Scotchmen seem to sober down too much into reserve : an undescribable matter-of-factness pervades them, and insensibly restrains the mind from any flight of gay or erratic fancy ; which, in a temperament, such as Esmé’s, it would be a great

relief sometimes to give utterance to. It was a hard case to feel occasionally, as she did, that the man to whom a whole evening's conversation must be devoted, and who would have it strictly kept within a sensible disquisition on sport, or farming, or maybe a cautious laugh at some dry bit of humour, might really bear within him far more exciting ideas: only she would never see them; and, in his presence, she must bring none of her own sunny thoughts to the surface, lest the sudden or unusual display should startle him into silence. He would be too much surprised even to regard them.

Miss Christy had been rather in a subdued state all day: a due sense of propriety kept her in the background; but during lunch, being happily placed betwixt Dr. and Mrs. Macconochie, and thus beyond the ken of the surrounding "fine gentry," her spirits gradually recovered. This was made evident more by signs than words. Lord Darnton quietly called Esmé's attention to Miss Christy, as she

mysteriously laid one pocket-handkerchief across her knees on the top of another, which she had already spread to preserve her dress: for she despised the use of a napkin. The purpose of this was soon apparent, when, by means of nods and becks, she had induced a servant to approach with a plate of cake; for, picking out a huge slice, she carefully wrapped it in the upper handkerchief and, producing a pin from her mouth, pinned it up.

Catching Esmé's and Lord Darnton's watchful eyes at the moment, she nodded confidentially, and whispered through her hand, as she thrust the prize into her pocket,

"Dreaming breid, my laird: I'll hae a bit ready for yoursel' afore night, an' ye'll just sleep upon it for good luck, ye see."

The first tears shed that day fell when Norah parted with her sisters in her own old room; and as she threw herself into her father's arms, tears stole down his manly cheeks. His warm heart bled as this first link was severed; for never had father's love more en-

twined itself amidst the youthful years of home-taught motherless daughters.

The young couple were gone; the people had gathered in hundreds on the lawn and round the carriage, and—despite the expostulations of Harold and Glenbenrough, who feared that Norah's firmness would at last give way—had claimed, in loud joyful lawlessness, the long accustomed honour of drawing the carriage past the "running stream." The horses were already out, and led down to the flower arch of the bridge; and the next moment, with speed that could have kept pace with theirs, those strong men whirled the carriage along. The gentlemen all went with it; and Glenbenrough, his hand firmly set upon the frame of the window nearest which Norah sat, ran with the vigour of a younger man, ready to shout the warning word at a moment's notice.

Norah had covered her eyes with her thick Brussel's lace veil; but ere the impatient horses, harnessed by fifty hands, had started,

and while the shouts of the people and the strains of the bagpipes were still echoing upon her ear, she leant out of the carriage, and again and again embraced her father. He then went round to grasp Harold's hand, and she gazed back upon the house, which stood out grey and clear; and as the rich July evening glow fell upon all the gay groups assembled upon the river banks, waving handkerchiefs and bonnets, she saw Esmé and Ishbel standing on the Roua Pass, whence they could best catch a last glimpse of the carriage.

That evening was long remembered by all present. Those guests who came from a distance had accommodation in the houses of Glenbenrough, Phee, the Manse, and at the Factor's, while a glorious summer moon tempted others to delay their drive home until early morning. Dancing was kept up in the sultry open air and within the house, while supper and refreshments were served all night in the dining-room and in the outer awning: in short,

it was what is called a “real Highland wedding;” and every one enjoyed it, from the ladies on the lawn to the lassies dancing in the barn. The bonfires on the hills were a beautiful sight, spreading crimson flashes all over the pale blue evening sky; and at about twelve o’clock, one on the summit of the Roua Pass burst forth into a blaze brighter than any yet had done.

CHAPTER VI.

L O V E T O R M E N T S.

O ! list yon thrush, my Mary,
That warbles on the pine ;
His strain sae light and airy,
Accords in joy wi' thine,
Singing aye welcome hame.

Hogg.

ON the night of Norah's wedding Esmé and Auber stood together on the Roua Pass, screened from the glare of the blazing bonfire by a projecting mass of rock, and silently gazing on the scenery around, which was lighted up by the bright midsummer moon, and flecked by the lurid hues of the fire-light from distant peaks.

To Auber there appeared more charms about Esmé this evening than ever before. She was paler than when he had last parted from her, and he thought she had even grown taller. Excitement, or it might be the few months more advance towards womanhood which generally darkens thoughtful eyes, had made her's of still deeper, softer blue; and the flexile expression of her lips was rather the sweet saddened smile, than the arch playful one of other days. He saw that she had had her thoughts deeply stirred this winter; and he had been right when he told her she would never be able to forget him: was not the shadow of a loved remembrance upon that clear and thoughtful brow?

Esmé was nervous; she dreaded Auber's voice; she feared the first change of it in approach to tenderness: if he spoke of love, how should she reply? Let him but give her time, and she would show him that those faithless words held no power over her. But she was safe that night: Auber tasted pleasure more

epicureanly. He must go back in the path, and lead her gently in the flowery chains up to that point where he left her in the autumn of last year. His words that night were only in softest ambiguity.

It was after a pause that Esmé asked quickly, and in a low tone, a question that had been sometime trembling on her lips.

“Is Mr. Marchmoram coming North, Mr. Auber?”

He turned round with that look of his of half surprised, doubting scrutiny; her eyes fell beneath his, and she coloured deeply as he replied,

“He may be here to-morrow, or he may not come at all: and his stay at Dreumah would, at any rate, be uncertain. Godfrey is too busy a man now, and has too many schemes afloat for his plans to be counted on. Did it strike you that Darnton resembled Marchmoram?”

Esmé turned as pale as her dress. Well might this man boast of his power. The subtlest shade escaped him not, and intuitive per-

ception seemed to teach him how to probe, if suspicion but ever so faintly pointed where.

He studied her downcast face as she replied, as firmly as she could,

“Yes, I think so.”

He drew out a packet of letters, and slowly selected one.

“This is Godfrey’s last: will you read it? It is short, and the moon is bright.”

Esmé’s hand shook as she took it, so that she could scarcely hold it; and she dropped the envelope, which a light breeze at the moment blew over the edge of the Pass and into the river. Auber’s gaze was fixed upon her, and suddenly he took her hand in his.

“Why this agitation? Is Godfrey Marchmoram’s name so dear? Esmé, Esmé, beware!”

He drew her towards him; but suddenly let fall her resisting hand, as the voices of Glenbenrough and Lady Mac Neil, who had ascended unobserved, sounded close beside them. Auber was never at fault; he gave Esmé one glance of appealing silence, and then picking

up Marchmoram's unread letter from the ground, advanced with careless *sang froid* towards her father and Lady Mac Neil.

Esmé sunk behind a drooping birch, out of sight, and then she moved on over the heather towards the red glare of the bonfire, attracted almost unconsciously towards the light like some half-wakened bird; and, when very near it, sat down upon a rock, her white dress floating around her.

Two men were standing beside the fire, but with their backs to her; they were conversing, and one of them suddenly giving a loud laugh accompanied by a grotesque foreign gesture, she recognised in him the Italian Gupini. The other was Ewen Mackenzie. They had been speaking low, but Gupini now raised his voice, and she heard him distinctly, though not so Ewen's answers.

“Corpo di bacco! Who die for a woman? Me left Napoli to save my life from one! si, si; a woman that Signor Auber me pay if me killed her: she love him too much—é troppo! You

only amuse yourself—me only amuse—they amuse; but who die?”

Esmé thought that Ewen’s reply was a deep-muttered curse.

“Ah! not your fault if she die: you forget her! You should see me manage Signora Lucia, il Signor Auber’s cara amica. She tear her hair and say she loved him so, and he dare not forsake her. I tell her to forget him, and make merry while life last. So I say to you—and you in Scozia! you are cold—you can forget, and a woman in Scozia can forget: I pity you not. But Lucia, la Gitana, she is as the Italian: her love is warm, her hatred is hot. Ah! per Dio, per Dio!” he exclaimed, with excited gesticulation; “che maraviglio! il mondo ammirabile! Lucia, la *Bella* bellissima! When I see her, and sudden memory came! How the old time revives. Life to me ever turns up strange, strange! She, so clever, was successful in life—her first love dead—but me?” Gupini ceased with a gasp.

Ewen then spoke long and vehemently, but

was frequently interrupted by Gupini, sometimes as if expostulating, sometimes in tones laughingly mocking. At last Ewen raised his voice with threatening gesture, and Esmé again heard the words.

“Look here; ye’re going the night, an’ I’m never to see ye mair: but ye gae not till I hear the name which you have aye told me ye could gie. I have na rested waiting for it since months: I hae my suspicions almost sure, but I want just your word. When I know it I am content: but look, if ye gie it not ye’ll meet me yet! I’m going to foreign parts, too: my young Master o’ Arduashien will send for me in twa months, or I’ll gae to him; an’ if ye’ll no satisfy me now,” Ewen bent down, placed his hand upon his skein dhu,* and tapped it significantly, “I’ll take this wi’ me, man, and trip after ye!”

Gupini retorted quickly, with much gesticulation; but Esmé only heard Ewen’s reply,

* Small sheathed knife worn in the garter.

as he threw a log of wood passionately into the fire.

“Na, na, coward! I’ll bring ye into no worse danger if ye’ll tell the name. I’ll do no harm to you or him, or any other. I’ll keep quiet, never ye fear.”

Gupini said a few words, and retreated, as if to descend the hill: he then called out,

“Well, guardatevi! E’ Signior—e’ Signior—Marchmoram! Addio!” then turning, he bounded down in the direction of the square.

Ewen stepped forward for a moment, seemingly breathless with rage; and as the fierce blaze of the new-kindled wood fell full upon his face, it would have done for that of the demon of fire. A fiendish expression of rage subsided into a withering laugh, and his lips distorted into a savage grin.

“So I was right! Weel, weel, he has made good use o’ Ewen Mackenzie! Insulted wi’ his tongue, struck wi’ his hand, and ruined my ain bit lassie! Weel, weel, we’ll see.”

He kicked the glowing embers right and left

with a sort of savage play, and turned quietly enough away; passing close to Esmé without seeing her. He made for the Pass, which he slowly descended on the side leading down to Lochandhu.

It was the third day after Norah's marriage, and quiet had come again on the house of Glenbenrough: the last guest had departed, and the faded flowers had all been swept away.

Early on the morning succeeding the marriage, Florh awoke Esmé with comfortable news:

"I hae been, an' come, frae Lochandhu," she said, "an' all is right. Hae no fear o' the lad: I found him packing a' his claithe when I went in, down to the very remindings o' Huistan, puir fellow.

"'An' for what are you doing this?' said I.

"'I'm going off to Arduashien,' said he: 'an' goodbye, mother; for I hae taken a sickening to this place. My mind's made up. I'll gae frae Arduashien to join my young master: he'll no refuse me now he's sick. An' my savings here,' showing me his leather pouch, 'will take

me o'er the sea to the foreign place he is in. Gie my fond love an' my forgieness to Jeanie Cameron. If a' goes right, I may yet see her and ye once more afore I go.' With the knowledge o' what was in his heart, I could na do mair than mak a faint pretending o' being against his going; for my heart was rejoicing, Esmé! An' so my poor lad went, an' my prayer following him. I'll gae to Arduashien the end o' the week, for he said himsel' he might na be gone till ten days; as I wad rather say good-bye till him there, than see him back here at all. I'll gae see Jeanie Cameron ere I go, and bring him the last words o' her."

Florh remained at Glenbenrough; and two days after Esmé said she would ride to Loch-andhu, as she had not gathered a water-lily this summer. She would also call at Erickava, in hopes of finding a precious first letter from Norah. Florh gave her the key of her cottage, as within it she would find the forked branch so long dedicated to the capture of the lilies.

Norah's letter lay at Erickava: it was very short, but very satisfactory; they had reached Blair Athol, one of the lovely resting places on the Highland road: their days had been cloudless, and they were very happy.

After seeing this missive despatched home, Esmé rode on to Lochandhu. It was one of those serene glowing days, like many and many on which she had before sat beside that bright little loch. The air was oppressive, as much from the heat as from the warm perfumes, which the sun brings out, as it does colour; and yet the honied heather, and the spicy aromatic flavour of bog-myrtle, thyme, and birch, are not o'er-powering in their sweetness, like the more luscious scents of lowland flowers. The lilies lay in a glittering heap, which she covered from the heat of the sun with their large green dripping leaves. How luxurious to lay down her head beside them, and listen, in the dreamy quiet, to the splash of the trout leaping up at the little disporting midges, and to hear the humming of the flashing dragon-

flies darting through the sunbeams on the gold-coloured water.

Where were her thoughts to find him? She drew vivid pictures, such as her imagination could always paint. She fancied the interior of the House of Commons, and sought o'er its crowded benches for the one commanding face; she pictured him, in his own room, reading the papers of the morning, and saw the impatient glance of his eye over their contents. She thought of him as driving onwards o'er the bleak Highland road, and in idea she urged the lagging horses to come faster on. She thought of him as writing to his friend that day, telling him that duty called him from London in some other direction, and that he would not visit Dreumah that year; and then the tears came. Oh! her heart was sick with longing to see him once again.

Once again. That was a strange feeling, mysterious in its undefined but all-pervading conviction that if they could but meet once again she should be satisfied. She went not beyond

that; but a craving for it certainly rested in her mind. She felt that so far as this went, it might be that then he would part from her no more; or else that then he would tell her he never could be with her again. Either way, her mind rested in shadowy but sure conviction of being thus settled. Her soul needed to be separated from the thralldom of its expectation: once satisfied it would rest in deep quiet ever after.

She raised her head and looked steadfastly athwart the hills towards Dreumah; slowly and slowly her gaze returned, lingering back o'er hill and glen, until it suddenly fell upon the stalwart figure of Marchmoram, within a hundred yards of her, advancing from a rugged rent in the rocks: with slow, firm step he came, bodily visible, himself—stepping strongly and easily over the sunken old tree roots, and over the sharp rocks and dark heather-holes intervening betwixt her and him. Esmé had been praying for his return; but when she saw him now—as if a wraith had risen awfully to her feet—

she arose, and with terror turned to fly. But his shadow was already on her, and his strong voice arrested and sustained her.

“Esmé!”

Then she stood, the colour faded from her cheek and left the whiteness, but not the rigidity, of marble. He reached her, his arms were around her, and one warm, passionate kiss brought back the glow.

“Esmé, you were not going to turn from me?”

That deep low voice, it sounded deeper, graver than last year. He sat her down again upon the heather, and he knelt upon a rock beside her and laid his hand tenderly on her fair shining head.

She looked up, the traces of tears still in her dark blue eyes, and said softly,

“Oh, you have been very long in coming.”

“I have been busy, Esmé; I am so still: I have entered on a life of slavery, where mind is the task-master, and where the body must obey; and I have treated mine very relentlessly for many months past.”

She saw that : his face was lined and fagged, and the tinge of colour on his brow and cheek feverish ; his eyes seemed to her to have darkened from their former brown more into gloomy black ; the thin cut lips to be still more sharply defined. He had not so much excitability as formerly, nor was there any recent glow of exultation on his face ; it was one that told of strife ; absorbing, but still unmarked by any decisive victory.

Esmé replied, her voice still nervously trembling, "I know you have been working hard, and I was almost thinking you would never return."

He bit his lip quickly ; sighed deeply as if wearied, and then said in a low measured tone,

"Esmé, Esmé, I have much to tell you ; but I want quiet rest with you for a time : I need to gain fresh life and strength with you, ere I speak on that which has brought me North. Latterly my soul has thirsted for this hour ; to be here again, to sit thus near

you, to hear your loving, tender voice, to feel the gentle heavenly influence which your very presence bears over me; and, above all, in this very weakness of my love, to gain strength for the great crisis which approaches. Child, let us be together for a time as we were in other days."

She then began to tell him of Norah's marriage; and as he sat there looking at her and listening, and heard her sunny laugh, marked the graphic colouring of each little sketch drawn for his amusement, and saw the naturalness of her ease with him, and noted that strength with which she threw back all shadow of doubt or future thought, and did return, as he had bade her, to the early times, the careworn contraction of that busy scheming brow seemed to relax, and the dawning smile of fresher days broke over the deeply-lined thoughtful face.

They sat there for sunny hours beside the Highland loch; and as Esmé, in the abstraction of her delight, allowed all the pent-up

thoughts—which had only found egress during the long desolate winter months in imaginary conversations with him—to flow freely forth, challenging back the playful contradiction or reply, Marchmoram rested himself in the freshest excitement, and renewed the vigour of his life. Here, with Esmé, he enjoyed the very idealism of debate, applied in sportive fancy, stripped of all bitterness, mere battle of loving wit against wit.

They went down to Glenbenrough. Marchmoram was received back as a returned and valued friend; and again the glow of pleasure dawned beneath the unmeasured, unstinted flow of welcome. Glenbenrough went half way up the Roua Pass to meet him, while Ishbel waited beneath to give her delighted greetings. What a warm genial evening it was!

Marchmoram again appeared as one of the family: they strolled to all the ancient haunts; they sat out until late, until the merle and the mavis ceased their serenade; and when they went in the air was still so warm, so

quiet, that every door and window was thrown open to admit the cool night air and the silvery light of the moon. Ishbel sat and rested her head against her father's shoulder, who smiled with proud content upon the two loved ones left him yet, while Esmé played her wild Gaelic airs, with Marchmoram standing near her. Esmé started as a low deep sigh breathed twice into the harmony; and when she looked up in the twilight the gaze that fell on hers seemed ever to deepen in its restless gloom. A feverish uncertainty appeared more or less in the abruptness and absence of his manner: Godfrey had returned, but in him there was no peace. Still he had returned; and did he not love her yet? had he not told her that he had ever thirsted for this return?

Scarcely had Marchmoram said good night, when Florh appeared, to ask Esmé for the key of her cottage; and when, with some confusion, Esmé, remembering at the same moment her basket of water-lilies fading on

the bank of the loch, owned to having forgot it, Florh replied shortly,

“It does na matter: I’ll find the door open for mysel’, for I’m going home the night, methal.”

“Why, Florh, you were to stay another week.”

“Na; I could not sleep sound the night here,” she replied; and Esmé reddened at the withering look which accompanied her words. “I’ll gae to Arduashien in ane or two days to see my son off, an’ I’ll bring him word o’ Jeanie Cameron, whose days are nearly run.”

“Well, good night, Florh,” Esmé replied; “I will go also to see poor Jeanie Cameron.”

Florh, as she went out, looked back and said, “I have had a letter frae Normal: maybe ye’ll see it by-and-bye.” And when she passed Marchmoram a moment afterwards in the entrance-hall, she courtesied deep and blandly to him.

Two days later, Glenbenrough and his

daughters spent a long day at Dreumah; it was almost as lovely and enjoyable as that first day when they had ridden there, now nearly a year ago; save that Norah's dear face was missing, and that the ludicrous substitution of Miss Christy's gaunt form for her slight graceful one, was almost painful in its absurdity.

Glenbenrough had smiled repeatedly the previous evening at the peal of laughter with which the girls heard that he had engaged her as the only eligible person, within reasonable distance; he considering that they would be the better for the company of a third lady. But he nearly repented when he saw her appearance next morning; Miss Christy being mounted on a bony Galloway accustomed occasionally to the plough at Phee, and taking as much exercise as her steed almost the whole way to Dreumah: sometimes running on foot while she whipped him up a hill, or anon standing perilously on his back while she gathered bunches of rowan

berries, and darting off and on the saddle in a hair-brained manner at every obstacle on the path.

They spent a long day by the loch, and drew from it upwards of fifty successful hauls, landing shoals of fish. Some of the gentlemen rowed Esmé and Ishbel in a pretty boat which Auber had brought North; while Miss Christy, who, during lunch, had sat in rather grim and doubtful silence—not abashed, as she afterwards owned, but merely, by inward observation, to “make herself acquainted” with them all—gave spontaneous play to her energies: encouraging the gillies by loud gesticulations, and, when she saw them slacken slothfully in the distance, writhing her body and arms frantically in order to urge them, by example, to more strenuous pulling at the ropes. At the largest haul, when Glenbenrough and Lord Darnton rushed down to assist, Miss Christy burst forward too; and from that moment returned no more to the dry land, but remained with the crew, labouring with her own hands and

awakening the echoes with her shrill fisherman-like cries.

Auber's curiosity had been aroused, and his jealousy slightly excited by Esmé's emotion in regard to Marchmoram on the night of Norah's marriage. His self-love was safe as yet, for from circumstances regarding Marchmoram in his knowledge, he would not believe him a rival; but he feared the possibility of Marchmoram's tender friendship for Esmé having led him to warn her, in a brotherly way, against trusting too implicitly to himself: he must discover and decide; but that was difficult.

Esmé to-day was just as in her first days there: joyous, enjoying, evidently unthinking of self; happy in the sunshine as a bird, flitting from place to place and from one to the other, ever ready to raise or join in the merry laugh, or to promote the last formed scheme. She was followed wherever she went by Marchmoram, who had resumed all that quiet authority and command which he used to hold over her and Ishbel; only Esmé used

to make the tenure very piquant by frequent rebellion.

Auber put on that manner of absent indifference which he could with such easy grace assume, and paid more attention to Ishbel; conversing on London gossip with Sir Edward Cressingham, whenever Esmé was near.

After dinner in the lodge, there was an adjournment to a grassy broom-perfumed knoll, where claret and fruit were partaken of in the delicious evening air with additional zest. Lord Darnton sang some songs; then Esmé and Ishbel joined in the beautifully simple "Baron's Heir," which Esmé once had sung to Marchmoram before; and he glanced so significantly, almost upbraidingly, at Lord Darnton, who was seated next to her, that the present look and past memory brought a vivid blush to her cheek. An earl, who would have realized the dream of that day, now sat admiringly beside her; but Fate ordained otherwise.

Lord Darnton then called upon Miss Christy for a song.

“Deed an’ deed, my lord, it’s mysel that should obey your honourable bidding; but it’s no in me: I never was a singer but in the kirk!”

“Well, Miss Christy, where was there ever a more attentive congregation than here?”

“Aye, ye may say that! we’re all quiet dacent folks enough, no fear of that; and for that matter, I never met a finer, cantier, bonnier, more glamoursome young chiel than yoursel’, my lord!” Miss Christy replied briskly, cunningly anxious to turn attention away from herself.

There were loud acclamations, while Lord Darnton bowed low, and Glenbenrough declared Miss Christy had evidently proposed his health; so it was drunk all round with due honour. After thanks, Lord Darnton returned to the charge, and pressed Miss Christy mercilessly.

“Aye, aye, it’s easy to see ye hae been a spoilt bairn, an’ accustomed to your ain way! Weel, I might venture, maybe, if I could be

sure ye would na mention it any further ; but I would na like to be made a fool o' by folks talking !” she answered at last, cautiously, and looking round the company with inquiring scrutiny.

“Talked of! not for worlds. I assure you it will never be mentioned!” replied several gentlemen at once.

Miss Christy then cleared her throat, and hastily muttered to herself the titles of certain popular melodies, commenting on each.

““ Jeanie dang the weaver?” no! ‘The deil’s amang the tailors?’ that’s not genteel enough. ‘Hey Cockernony?’ I doubt they wad comprehend it: well, what else? ‘We’re a noddin—nid nid noddin?’ Hout tout! no suitable to the occasion. I don’t mind one——” she paused.

A note of attention was struck against a glass by Lord Darnton: the company were not expected to be aware that Miss Christy was in difficulty; but she shortly announced it.

“No, no, my lord, leddies,, and gentlemen; I’ll no risk it! I canna mind any one suitable;

an' I could na trust ye but ye might tell on me! I'll no risk it. I'll no have Christy Macpherson's name sent travelling o'er the hale country side for the sake o' a sang!"

There was such a general appeal raised that Miss Christy was driven to extremity.

"Weel, if I must sing, I'll be upsides wi' ye: I'll tak care to sing what I don't care where ye tell it. I'll no sing any light-spoken sang. I'll gie ye the psalm o' 'Martyrdom,'" she said, with a grin both at its suitableness of title and at the choice; which she thought must ever prevent any spiteful observation or uncharitable construction on the part of a misjudging world.

Accordingly, without further preliminary she broke forth in an opening howl, which speedily called forth echoing reply from the neighbouring kennel. With eyes shut, and bony hands clasped, as absorbed as if at that moment seated in the parish church, Miss Christy yelled out the primitive words, anon in shrill cry of supplication, then down to guttural depths, and

throughout with the nasal intonation used by the Gaelic singers of the Scotch psalms.

Assuredly neither Lord Darnton nor any one could have foreseen what he had brought upon them. The unearthly discord lasted through fourteen verses ; and at last the suppressed laughter induced serious consequences : Ishbel bit a piece convulsively out of her wine glass, and cut her mouth ; Sir Edward Cressingham allowed an involuntary noise to escape from his compressed lips ; Esmé, who never could restrain her risible faculties past a certain point, rushed precipitately from the scene, and Marchmoram followed, and joined her by the lodge door.

Marchmoram asked Esmé if she had ever been on the summit of Craigchrisht, the father mountain of Dreumah, whose fantastic peak now glittered and shone in the evening glow ; the heat of the day was over, and he would take her up the rugged sides by the shortest route, which ran almost directly from the back of the lodge.

This was one of the highest hills in that part of the country. They climbed up, the air getting keener and rarer at every step, until their limbs, instead of wearying, seemed more elastic, and a feeling of buoyancy urged them on. They passed over ground of different soil and aspect; first, through the worn trunks of ancient trees, dead and leafless: the ground was soft and soundless, covered with thick ancient moss, into which they sunk to the knees at every step. They came up to the gully ravines of heather and natural grass, and the grouse in strong-fledged covies flew up ever and anon, whirring past with a gust of air.

Then the grass began to disappear, and they got upon the slippery rock foundation, and up they went: water ran bubbling and sparkling over rocky ridges, and in deep silvery channels; the light striking upon all shades of colour, from light blue to purple, slate, and dark-red granite. It was very steep. At last, hand in hand, they reached the top—a huge,

broad, flat pedestal of white rock, which glittered like crystalline marble in the evening sun; further back rose the few gigantic rocks hurled grandly together that formed the cross on the peak, which from the first days of Christianity had given a name to the hill.

They now stood eighteen hundred feet above the sea. The view was sublime. Beneath appeared the lesser and the greater hills in ranges and groups, with sweeps of wood and water, stretching as far as eye could reach. They counted thirteen lochs, and traced the rivers Dual, Rouagh, Nightach, and many others: the eye even reached the far-off chasm of the seven falls of Aultva, fringed by weeping birch. The colours of every object were brought out in glowing intensity in their natural hues by the summer sun, which now cast its parting rays o'er the scene. The air seemed to Esmé to become too rare for her lungs: it affected her sensibly. Twice she lay down and put her lips to the cold white stone, and that brought back and steadied her breath.

As they gazed, Esmé said,

“I don’t think any one but ourselves could understand the wonderful power which nature has over us as a family; it is quite strange how exquisite an influence scenery has over all of us: as sisters, we feel it in each other; and it has come inherently from both papa and mamma to us.”

Marchmoram did not reply, and Esmé went on speaking, as he seemed listening.

“It is a gift for which we should be very grateful; for while life lasts this subtle influence of nature’s beauties upon our inner senses must tinge it. Oh, how deeply I feel it! Within the four walls of a house, one may be crushed by outer grief, or wearied unto death by uncongenial companionship; earth-bound hopelessly: but let us go out to the hills, and, surrounded by air, water, sky, my spirit rises superior to earthly cares, and I soar beyond this anxious life.”

The last words dropped very quietly.

They still gazed, but Esmé could not but

note the strange excitement so visibly arising in Marchmoram. He was not thinking of the present: that restless darkening flashing eye was wandering further than the scenery. At last he spoke, after long silence: his voice sounded harsh in its firm deep tone, and abrupt gestures accompanied his words.

“Esmé, do you know what I am like just now?” he smiled bitterly as she looked wonderingly up to him. “We two, standing here together, so near, so far apart from others, are two different beings. You are worshipping nature, so am I; but, Esmé, I stood upon a height once before, and there was one who stood by me (I feel he listens now), and he showed me a world beneath: not like this, solitary, God-like, lonely; but one of animated bustling crowds of uplifted faces, eager for patronage and throwing incense upwards to those great ones of the earth on high seats above: one stood by me pointing to the lofty throng and offered me rank, wealth, and many other dazzling things,

and I accepted. Esmé, you would not have pictured this to me; you would have helped me in its enjoyment, were it mine, but you could not have said, 'I will give it you.'"

She was quite silent; he went rapidly on.

"Child, I have miserable things to lay before you: you are very young, but you are strong."

She listened to the avowal of his love and his desire that she should wait a favourable time. She could do that; she could wait to the end: she was strong as he could wish; but those ruthless words received no spoken answer from her.

He scarce had ceased when the old mountain echoes seemed to take up the words and carry them vauntingly onwards. A low, distant peal of summer thunder rolled overhead, and went muttering away: it was followed by two crashes in rapid succession. The dread of thunder and lightning was with Esmé a constitutional terror: the electric state of the atmosphere affected her. She caught

Marchmoram's hand and bent down upon the rock beside him, while peal followed peal, each caught up and carried onwards in long, low, distant moans to the far-off hills.

“Oh! I can't stay here: take me down!” she cried.

They went on; the thunder breaking louder over their heads, the lightning fitfully illuminating the scene. She clung to him, and again—as on that day nigh a year ago, on the wilds of Corrieandhu—his strong arm supported her. As they descended, the thunder died away and the lightning flashed fainter. He stopped then, and she smiled at her fears; he pushed back the hair tenderly from her brow, and they went lingering down. When near the lodge, he stooped and gave her one firm kiss upon her brow.

When they reached the knoll they found tea and coffee had taken the place of wine and fruit; and also that the ponies stood saddled at the door.

As his daughters prepared to mount, Glen-

benrough told Marchmoram that he expected Sir Henry and Lady Lauriston to arrive in a week from Strathshielie, where they had gone for a few days after Norah's marriage, and that then he hoped to spend some more pleasant days in the society of the gentlemen of Dreumah, who would be expected to join many projected open-air parties. In the discussion of these the cavalcade moved on, attended part of the way by the gentlemen; Marchmoram, with folded arms, and in seeming attention, conversing with Glenbenrough, while Lord Darnton walked behind, in fits of laughter at Miss Christy. Auber was at Esmé's side, and modulated his voice so that it should reach but her; he said but a few words ere they parted.

"Did you enjoy your walk, Esmé?"

"Yes, Mr. Auber: the view was so grand and beautiful, I never can forget it; only the thunder startled me at the end."

"Ah! it thundered?" he said, with a mock air of surprise: "so the elements came out

to express their astonishment at Marchmoram's news?"

"I don't understand you," Esmé replied.

"Why, it made a sensation in London," he said, looking with the same amused smile.

"I don't know what you refer to."

"Ah! well; really not? Did Marchmoram seek so long a *tête-à-tête* without giving you his confidence?"

"What do you mean?" she reiterated with *naïveté*, "explain—tell me."

"No, I may not do that, Esmé, if he really withheld it," Auber replied: "it would be treachery to do so; and a man should do as he would be done by, you know. But at the same time," here he dropped his voice to a whisper, and glanced with deepest meaning—a tender, interested, searching glance, "my conscience bids me tell you (mind, I only speak now of that), bids me warn you that, if you feel any interest in Godfrey Marchmoram, it must be but abstract: no other is safe for you, Esmé. Trust in me this time."

She looked at him; and as they rode on the next moment, Glenbenrough having called out farewell, she noticed the very same soft shadowy smile that she remembered first observing under the August moonlight there, nearly a year ago.

The gentlemen all stood still together until the riders were out of sight, then strolled back to the lodge, to end the evening with cards and conversation.

Marchmoram did not go in, and no one asked him why; he always did what suited him best. He went down to the river that ran brawling at the back of the house, and walked along it. He was in nearly as excitable a mood as on that night at Thistlebank, but more concentrated: less turbulent and demonstrative, but darker, moodier, and more determined. He walked there by the heathery banks of the river, with the quiet, melancholy moon looking down upon him, and the rushing, frothing water with the same cold, calm light which had fallen for ages and ages on

the restless midnight dreams and busy waking strife of mortals.

The strong-winged wild birds, mated in tired sleep beneath the blooming purple heather, were happier in their generation than he.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CRISIS.

I'm wearin awa, like snaw when it's thaw,
I'm wearin awa to the land o' the leal.

BURNS.

"The winds were laid, the air was still,
The stars they shot athort the sky;
The fox was howling on the hill,
And the distant echoing glens reply."

It was about eight o'clock the next evening when a message was delivered to Esmé from Florh. It was brought by a little herdboy who could not speak English, but he told her in Gaelic that Jeanie Cameron was dying,

and restless to see her, and Florh hoped Esmé would come for an hour. He then put into her hand a small paper parcel, and the moment after was off again, like an escaped hawk, to his post on the hill.

Esmé's pony was made ready, and she started at once; Glenbenrough and Ishbel walked up the Roua Pass with her. As she parted from them her father said,

"If you are later than ten, you will find Ishbel and me sound asleep when you return: but do not hurry if you can be any comfort to the poor girl."

"No, papa," she replied, with a smile; "there's not much danger of anything happening to me."

The evening was bright and lovely; but Esme's errand was a solemn one, and inward feeling shadowed it much as on that genial evening when Marchmoram returned to Glenbenrough. She had had some bitter moments in the quiet of her own room the previous night. Auber's light words had struck bale-

fully at first, and poignant doubt stabbed her more than once: what had he meant? Did a rival exist in Marchmoram's heart? Was there reason to doubt his truth? No; away with all suspicion. Was her belief to be shaken by a mere hint from another? was she to read his heart in the mocking smile of his friend? No, that were unworthy of her and of him. With the natural trustingness of her character, Esmé refused to credit Auber's cruel words.

Still this was a melancholy ride to Jeanie's cottage; and some tears fell (she scarce knew why) over the contents of the parcel that Florh had sent by the little herd-boy. It was a letter from Normal Mac Alistair to his foster mother, dated some weeks back: she read it slowly several times over as she rode along. Here, at any rate, she saw herself beyond the power of rival: it was the first time, in all their long childhood together, that Normal's heart lay open to her.

“MY DEAR NURSE FLORH,

“You will have heard of my long and dangerous illness; but now, thank God, it’s over, and I hope to be able to shoot a red deer at home yet, and to wear your plaid for a blanket on the hills of Spain out here again on many nights to come.

“You must write to me. But let no other eye but your own read this: burn it in your peat fire the moment you have read it. Florh, I have had an idle time, lying here with my fever; and as I have not yet quite recovered, I must ask you to minister to my weakness. I have seen and learned much since I have been in all these foreign countries, and led a thinking as well as a working life; and I thought, while in my strength and health, that all former boyish weakness was now passing away: but lying here prostrate, my mind has gone hopelessly back to the olden time. Florh, it is to you alone I could tell it—from you alone I can hear. Write to me of Esmé. She

occupies my heart night and day ; never, never is she absent : during all my fever, I believe it was the happy delirium of her presence which supported me in life ; for I imagined her ever with me. We were together here, there, and in the Highlands ; and but that one idea possessed my wandering senses. It is infatuation ; but it is part of my life—of my disease I should rather say.

“There is one here to whom I owe much. One gentler, more kind to me than ever Esmé was ; and yet I cannot love her more than I do Norah, though she is as young, and prettier than Esmé. Florh, ere your letter reaches me, I will be well again. I think of starting for Gibraltar to join a yacht there on a long Eastern voyage. Write me nothing but the truth about Esmé—I can bear it all. Have the Englishmen come North ? Is she engaged to Mr. M. ? This must soon be known : let me know it too, for it concerns me most. Florh, her happiness makes mine ; so scruple not to say what you know. I am no coward !

My love is not selfish; it goes utterly to her: and if she is happy in her love for another, then my parting wish will only be that he may ever deserve it.

“I will write you shortly as to my plans for Ewen. Destroy this letter faithfully, and believe me

“Your affectionate foster son,

“NORMAL.”

This sudden revelation of the depth and devotedness of Normal's affection for her would at another time, and under other circumstances, have revived and strengthened the feelings of regard that Esmé had long entertained for him, but which she was not conscious were any other than those of familiar friendship: but now she felt perplexed and bewildered; and what would have filled her with delight, had not this lingering love for Marchmoram still absorbed her, now served only to distress her, by causing mingled sensations of regret, doubt, and concern. She dared not allow herself to

think too much of Normal; yet her thoughts would, unbidden, revert to him, prompted by the spontaneous flow of kindly feelings that had lain hid in the depths of her nature; and she began to reproach herself for unkindness in having caused him to feel pain by her open preference for the society of the Englishmen. Might she not have sacrificed a strong and abiding love for a transient flame of passion? Yet could she doubt Marchmoram's fervour, or his sincerity? No, she would not so wrong him. But still an indefinable, unrecognised sense of insecurity would torment her, in spite of herself; and then her heart would yearn towards the absent Normal, and the presence of the fair girl who nursed him would create a strange feeling of uneasiness.

Such a conflict of emotions had been roused in the breast of Esmé by the perusal of this letter of Normal's, that it was a relief to her to find her sympathies diverted into a new channel by arriving at Jeanie Cameron's cottage.

When Esmé entered the small peat-smoked room, she at first saw only her foster mother, who was bending over the fire heating some goat's milk and oatmeal; but a short hacking cough issuing from the darkened recess in the wall which contained the bed, made her turn there: the gleaming eyes of the poor girl lying there pierced through the gloom, and reached Esmé where she stood. She approached the bed, and, taking the wasted hand lying listlessly on the counterpane, gazed with tearful eyes on the dying girl. She could scarcely believe that the hollow, colourless face, bloodless lips, sharp features, and attenuated form before her, was really what had been the ruddy, sunburnt, and strong-limbed Jeanie of other days. The very expression of the face was totally changed: formerly a blithe good-humoured stolidity alone marked it; now a saddened grieving look, lit up by eyes bright with preternatural lustre, gave it an unearthly aspect. It was not Jeanie Cameron lying there, it was the shadow of the Highland girl, whose

immortal spirit struggled to escape from the frail tenement of clay. She would not have looked thus in dying, nor would she have died thus, had she been Ewen's contented and respected wife.

As Esmé sat there later, and felt the pressure of Jeanie's thin wan hand, she saw the hectic flush of shame rise to her brow, and listened to the repenting, almost eloquent, words of the stricken, dying girl.

Jeanie was very weak; but when she saw Esmé, she tried to raise herself, and faintly smiled a welcome: and when Esmé, having placed the pillows more upright and supportingly, seated herself on a wooden stool beside the low bed, she whispered in a broken voice,

“ Oh! you dinna ken, Miss Esmé, the fancy I have aye had to you since the days when you were a wee bairn (mysel' not very much bigger), and my eyes, in the kirk, used to wander off the book just to look at your glancing curls forenent me. I took a longing to see you, and speak to you, before I died; for someway my heart always went drawing after you.”

“Yes, Jeanie,” Esmé answered very quietly, in a broken voice; “I will come every day to see you until you are better. I did not know you were so ill: I have taken an interest in you, too, for a long time, and will do so still. We will bring the doctor to-morrow, and you will get on nicely then.”

“No, no, no doctor, please dearie Miss Esmé!” Jeanie cried, with faint anxiety, and with a quick appealing look towards Florh, who had not spoken since Esmé’s entrance, but still occupied herself at the fire. “The sight o’ him would only hurry me to my grave. I hae no more use o’ doctors; one o’ them told me yon himself,” she whispered: “but do ye come an’ read the words o’ life to me, which will help me to gain it after I am deid.”

Esmé took her little Bible out of her pocket.

“I will read to you for a little, Jeanie, and then, if you like, I will sing a hymn to try and make you sleep.”

“I’ll no sleep till I hae my speech with

you done, Miss Esmé: but read, aye do read; choose something for a weary, weary sinner. Oh! come," she called to Florh, "and put your prayers up with mine, for I need them."

Florh drew near them, and sat on the edge of the bed; while Esmé read, in a low soft voice, and with deep earnestness, her favourite psalm, the fifty-first: she was interrupted as she proceeded, by convulsive sobs from Jeanie.

"I doubt if she has strength for more, the now," Florh said as Esmé ceased; "if we could settle her to sleep, it would be weel."

Florh then arranged the dark home-spun bedclothes tidily, while Esmé, taking a pitcher, went out to a spring before the door, and, having filled it, poured cold water and vinegar into a basin. She bathed the hot feverish hands and brow with her own handkerchief, which she afterwards bound round Jeanie's head; then putting some strawberries between the parched lips, moved gently away. She opened the low-roofed door and window for the scarce-stirring breeze to enter, while she and Florh

sat down outside the door. Jeanie fell into a light dreaming sleep in the stillness of the twilight; the Gaelic moans and cronans of old Ian Mohr, who sat crouched on a log of wood by the fire within, making an inexpressibly mournful lullaby. She was his darling grandchild; and the old man's failing strength all winter seemed to have gradually given way with her increasing weakness. They could hear him sighing every now and then,

"We'll no be parted, we'll no be parted! grandfather's ready, darling lassie: we'll gae tottering out in death thegither."

"This is very good of you, Florh, and God will bless you for it," Esmé said, as she and Florh sat whispering together in the moonlight, and she placed her hand affectionately on her foster mother's knee.

"Whisht, ma guil!" Florh replied, a strange and not pleasant smile breaking over her face, "Jeanie should hae been my good daughter,*

* Daughter-in-law.

an' I would hae had the nursing o' her then. Puir lassie, puir lassie! I wad like my ain mind made easy ere she die: I wish to hear the truth from her. I hope she'll sleep now; for I think it's to you she'll tell it: when she wakes, if her strength is better, I feel sure she'll tell you. I am longing to be off to Arduashien to see my Ewen ere he goes. And noo, Esmé," she added quickly, "will you gie me yon letter? it must be burnt the night."

Esmé put Normal's letter into Florh's hand, who thrust it into her bosom. There was a mutual silence. At last Esmé said, as if anxious to revert to Jeanie,

"If she is so near death, you won't leave her, I hope: don't leave her at the last, when she seems so thankful and grateful to you."

"We must do things by calculation in this world, Esmé," Florh replied, with gloomy determination: "this lassie is no for long on the earth, and me being with her would not delay her departure. My son is my only

comfort now, and he is going awa' too; and I canna spare more time from him an' his companie for the sake o' one who will soon be gone for ever. It is for his sake I spend my time now; for I feel confident he'll never be right settled till he know, one way or another, the whole truth about her."

A slight stir and sigh showed that Jeanie was again awake. Florh put her finger to her lip and motioned Esmé urgently to go in. It was darker within the cottage than without, and almost cooler, as the rough uncemented stones, which form the rude building of a Highland hovel, let the air and damp through.

Jeanie made a gesture to Esmé to shut the door; she pushed it close, leaving Florh without, and seated herself again beside the bed. The dying girl's voice was fainter than before, as she said,

"Oh! I wish my father would come: if I can tell ye, dearie Miss Esmé, o' my sinful self, and then die in father's arms, I think

I'll die content; but none but yourself must hear it."

Esmé rose and audibly asked Florh to go to a hillock in front, where she could see distinctly, and to come and tell Jeanie if Donald Cameron came in sight; for she thought he might yet arrive: he had been called to a distant sheep farm that morning. Florh went.

"Dear grandfather, wrap your plaid round your head," Jeanie faintly said.

The old man quietly did as she bade him; but his eyes watched her lovingly from beneath the folds, which prevented his hearing her voice. Esmé alone listened to the whispered confession; rambling, yet touching, in its frequent but quaint allusions and broken utterance of English.

"Miss Esmé, it was the deil tempted me," Jeanie continued, when she had finished telling her of her guilty acquaintance with Gupini, the Italian valet, at Dreumah; "there is no doubt o' that; but I feel humbly sure his work is done wi' me: the deil triumphed o'er

me on the earth, but he'll no be fit to follow me or hinder me from heaven. I hae been repenting these many, many months. There's no one knows o' my disgrace but my aunt at Braemorin, and I think my father kens it now; and you know it, Miss Esmé: but I cannot bear to think that Ewen or his mother would ken it. I have na strength left to tell them and dint it into them the way my silly, vain, suffering self was glamoured; and how I think now, and how I raved and screeched in the winter nights, thinking o' how the look o' yon black eyes and the unknown sound o' his flattering tongue were but the visible impersonations o' the deil himsel'. He won me then, but that is all worthless now: he has na won my soul; for I am sorry—sorry—sorry!" Her tears choked further utterance.

Esmé was very pale; for there was something awful in sitting thus alone by a death-bed, for the first time in her life, and listening to a confession of guilt, which, at any time, her refined and delicate mind would have

shrunk from: but this was not the time for weak thoughts of self. She spoke earnestly and impressively to Jeanie, urging her still to repentance and inward prayer; and then very gently she tried to persuade her to hint the truth to Florh.

“Because, Jeanie,” she whispered, “you know how miserable she and Ewen were about your changed behaviour; and I have reason to think that they laid the apparent cause and blame upon another and guiltless person. Now you surely would not wish that any injustice should be connected in this way with your repentance?”

“I could na thole Ewen to ken for whom I preferred him; I don’t think I could mention yon foreign name: I could na tell him that; the scandalization would be ower great,” Jeanie said restlessly.

“Well, at any rate, tell Florh this:—that you assure her it was not any one of higher degree than yourself. Or tell her solemnly, if you prefer that, that it was not an *English*-

man: neither gentle nor simple. You should do this, Jeanie; for otherwise you will leave an impression of falseness, which you should not for a moment allow. Clear this to them, at any rate, Jeanie: a very few words will do. Florh will not speak to you in your present weak state; and do not think she will ever vilify your memory. No; whatever you say will remain for ever buried with her, I am sure."

Jeanie sighed deeply. "Weel, weel! the more I humble myself the better. I will try and tell the whole story; and if I'm no fit for that, I will certainly take the blame off any other. Never doubt, Miss Esmé, ere the dawn I'll say (should it be my last words) that no Englishman had to do wi' my sin. An' now I am wearying for my father. I hae one request o' him—that he wad bury me in the kirk yard at Braemorin: my aunt can show him the spot, near to a little wee mound o' green sward that was planted there not two months ago. I hae a little wee one waiting

to keep me companie in the mould ; but dinna tell this to Ewen."

Esmé heard the tones of an approaching man's voice, speaking in Gaelic and weeping ; and she told Jeanie her father was coming. The next moment he entered with Florh : Esmé went out ; her foster mother followed her, and they sat in the solemn quiet of a night among the hills.

An hour later, Jeanie's strength began rapidly to sink ; and suddenly both Florh and her father declared that the only thing left to sustain life would be some wine. As in the old days of Scripture, so with these primitive people, wine is often considered the great elixir of declining life, or cure of hopeless wounds. Donald Cameron cried urgently for wine, and wrung his hands over his fainting daughter. Where could wine be got at that place and hour ? The answer was ready ; both Florh and Esmé said at Dreumah, which, by the hill track from there, might be reached in about half an hour.

The way lay principally through a dark boggy ravine, and by the edges of lonely little tarns, until it issued upon the banks of Loch Nightach at the back of the lodge; and it was haunted, not only by kelpies and bogles, but by the restless ghost of a murdered pedlar, whose commemorative cairn stood on a hill half way, and who was believed to wander there night and day in search of his pack, which had been sunk, rifled, in the bog. Donald Cameron could not go, for Jeanie now held his hand tight in her parting grasp, imploring him to leave her no more: she could not bear to die and him away.

Ian Mohr's feeble step would make too long delay, and so Florh said she would go, if Esmé, on her pony, would come with her: the strong-nerved woman was weak where native superstition came in the way. Esmé told her to bring the pony round from the shed where he was stabled, while she said a last prayer by Jeanie's bedside.

It was now nearly twelve o'clock; but Esmé

would ride home direct from Dreumah. She promised to return, were Jeanie still in life, the next evening, which was Sunday. Jeanie blessed Esmé, and whispered that she would tell Florh the truth about herself, when the latter came back with the wine, and that she would hope for some of that forgiveness from Florh which she now trusted to find from heaven.

Ere they started, Florh approached the fire and threw in Normal's letter, which she watched until it was consumed to ashes.

As they drew near to Dreumah, they consulted on how to apply for admittance there; at least for Florh, as Esmé would, of course, keep out of sight. Florh said she had heard that Lord Darnton and Sir Edward Cressingham had gone for a day to a shooting box some distance off, and that Mr. Marchmoram had ordered his hill pony to be in readiness to take him to Glenbenrough that evening; consequently only Mr. Auber would be at home, and likely gone to bed; while the

English valets would be loth to rise and open the door to a Gaelic summons at that hour.

“But deed,” she continued, “now I’m thinking, I’m no sure, but I heard the two lords that have arrived at Dalcarra shooting went to Dreumah to-day, and no that any of the Dreumah gentlemen went to them; an’ if this is the case they’ll be sitting up with Mr. Auber, and my knock will be heard by them whether the valets hear it or no. I think we should gae round about quietly an’ keek in at the window, where we’ll see them sitting at their wine, if they are there.”

It was a relief to emerge shortly after on the banks of Loch Nightach and to hear sounds of life issuing from the watchful baying hounds in the kennel close at hand. Esmé tied Suila to a tree, which was scorched by the smoke from one of the fires she had helped to kindle there a few days ago, and then she and Florh quietly moved on, and came out from the hills into the amphitheatre in front. It was

beautiful; not gloomy and eerie like the sunken track they had followed, but bright with tints of warm green, purple, and grey, in the clear translucent moonlight.

The lodge was lighted up. The window of the sitting-room was wide open, and the murmur of voices was distinctly heard on the summer night air. Esmé pulled Florh back, as they stood upon the crisp natural grassy plat, and said,

“Sit down for a moment, Florh, and then we can go and look: I don’t know whether it is the warm perfumed air here, or the few last hours in Jeanie’s cottage, but I feel faint.”

Florh looked at her; she was certainly very pale. She had taken off her riding-skirt when she reached the cottage, and was now in her high white evening dress, her hair braided back, and a white handkerchief tied loosely round her head instead of her straw hat, which was not so cool. No spirit, flitting mournfully over past scenes, could have looked more unearthly than did Esmé at this moon-

light hour. She sat down upon a heather bank and, with eyes fixed upon the opened window, sighed deeply.

“Florh, I don’t know what strange feeling is over me: will you go on alone, and see who is there, and then knock at the back door of the lodge? I won’t go nearer than this.”

“What for, my bairn? what ails you?”

“I don’t know. Florh, there is such a curious presentiment over me; I could not describe it: a presentiment as if something were going to happen. I feel it! I wish I were at home: perhaps a thunder-storm is coming on.”

“Rouse up, rouse up, methal gaolach!* don’t let fancies or freets come over you: it’s no like you,” Florh replied, soothingly. Then, as Esmé still sat without moving, she sat down too, right opposite her, and a curious expression came over her face. She put her

* Dear darling.

hand on Esmé's, and looked at her with eyes glittering strangely, like a snake's; her voice took the fascinating power of its gaze also. She spoke with a convincing force which carried Esmé's imagination and belief with it, and stimulating them, gave her strength to rise and obey.

“Don't let fancies trouble you,” she said, “but listen. If ye hae a presentiment, so have I: Esmé, Esmé, it was travelling wi' me every step here the night; an' when you said just now you had a presentiment, the words louped back to my heart. Ye know that strange freets hae been given to me; that my readings o' dreams hae a name o'er the whole country; that I am seldom wrong where I choose to speak; that uncanny things hae happened, o' the coming o' which I had given warning. Weel, when ye stepped ben the cottage the night, I did not speak; for my eyes were fixed, and my tongue needed to be spell-bound, watching curious things connected wi' ye in the fire ashes. It's coming! Ye may greet sair;

for I saw tears: there was peril, and there was rejoicing: but strengthen yourself. Rise up now: the sough o' your name reaches me here. Gae to yon window: and here I bid you, in the name of great Roi' Orduchadh,* to stand still, and if you hear your own name not to turn away."

"Florh," replied Esmé, rising up, "I am not going to listen!" and she smiled for a moment, almost amusedly, at the suggestion so evidently conveyed. But her foster mother's face remained darkened in its earnestness, as she replied,

"Child, go on and see who is sitting there; for it's out o' yon open window that the power o'er you comes. It's within there. I am going round, an' when I get the wine, I'll come quiet for you back again."

Florh slid away with the noiseless tread of a wild cat, while Esmé moved on under the shadow of the lodge; she reached the window,

* Destiny.

and from behind its projecting wooden ledge looked in.

The hart's-horn chandelier was blazing brightly with waxen lights; the red frieze curtain, that, when the nights grew cool in autumn would be drawn across the window, now hung richly by the side, throwing reflected glow from the burning embers in the low turf grate upon the figures of Marchmoram and Auber, reclining easily in their comfortable chairs. They were the sole occupants of the room: the other two men must have gone to Dalcarra.

Newspapers, cigars, books, and wine were on the table; and the little bedroom doors, marked No. 2 and No. 3, stood invitingly open. Auber yawned slightly as Esmé looked in; but Marchmoram was sitting with his gravest, most composed expression, his lips drawn rather down, and his eyes fixed in inward meditation on the fire: he moved his chair and sat with his back towards the window, as Auber lolled, with head thrown back, in dreamy repose.

Was it presentiment that chained her feet so

irresistibly to the ground? Esmé could not move: she stood like one in a state of catalepsy, or as if Florh, who stood in the shadow opposite, with upraised hand, had thrown her into a mesmeric trance.

Auber spoke first: the musical tones of his voice struck pleasantly on Esmé's ear.

"Well, Godfrey, you must be wending South soon, I suppose? and then our old days of friendship will begin to draw to a close. You will soon pronounce the words which will henceforward exclude me from our ancient confidence."

Marchmoram replied, with a slight low laugh,

"I cannot speak from experience, Herbert; but still I have pretty strong conviction that this will not follow in our case. I do not expect to be monopolised so much."

"And on the strength of still undiminished intimacy I may say that I believe you," Auber said, glancing at his friend; "I think I know you sufficiently for that. As for the qualities of the other person, he 'who runs' may

read' that they are not such as to indulge any jealous weakness: you are a pair of strong minds, and will act independently. Nevertheless," he continued, with head thrown back, "this step will separate us more; for it will hurry you on in your career. In the business of life there will be less leisure for relaxation and for friendship's quiet pleasures."

Marchmoram did not immediately reply; and when he did, it was to say very abruptly,

"Herbert, have you really no thoughts whatsoever of marrying? I should like to see you driven to that state."

"Me, Godfrey! no, not I," Auber replied. "But, apropos, now we are alone, I want to lay my case before you, and ask you to help me if you can: if not, you ought, at any rate, to feel remorse; for you, I suspect, are the cause of its present hopelessness. Do you recollect a little theory I opened to you in our last conversation on that confounded Lucia: whose death, by-the-bye, I am glad Gupini has ascertained. It was that of cultivating in-

timate acquaintance with a fresh susceptible mind ; a sort of Platonic love, that gives one power without responsibility."

Here—Marchmoram striking the fire-irons with his heel, accidentally (for he muttered at the noise that ensued when they came clattering down)—Auber was interrupted for a moment ; but he went on, in the subsequent silence, with perfect equanimity.

"Well, you knew very well where I pointed, and you showed no discouragement then ; save merely asking, with a brotherly kind of interest, whether what was play to me, might not prove deadly to her ? Was it not so ?"

Esmé's eyes had been fixed upon Marchmoram all the while she was gazing through the open window : they had never once turned to Auber ; though she might have seen the face of the latter from where she stood. Her expression of agonised suspense was terrible ; and later, when she heard the more cruel words, an on-looker might have traced horror in the burning dilated eye and half-opened

lip: but it was the horror of a passionate, injured woman.

Marchmoram gave a little laugh, and replied:

“That was kind of me, and as much as could have been expected; for I have never seen your power fail where you chose to exert it, Herbert: and I had some feeling of pity here!”

“But,” pursued Auber, “I am going to put you on your defence: I suspect that when I spoke to you then, you had been before, or rather after, me; for you left this part of the country later than I did last year. I suspect you were the selfish one, Godfrey, and that you have robbed me of the bloom of my Highland water-lily.”

“You are mistaken,” was the reply.

Esmé could not now see Marchmoram’s face, for he had turned to confront Auber during the last speech; nor did she detect the exact tone of his voice: she merely heard the words as they fell distinct and heavy on her heart, as a death-knell.

“I ought to be mistaken,” Auber replied,

“but I fear I am not: you have out-run me in enjoyment, at any rate. But you are luxurious in your stoicism, Godfrey: you thought the toilsome pursuit of ambition required some recreation, and, without remorse, you rob me of my coveted plaything for an hour’s solace for yourself. Was this fair?”

“Pshaw! you know well I have for some time been engaged to Lady Ida Beauregard,” Marchmoram replied, with forced calmness.

A convulsive sound, as of impeded respiration, made both men start and turn their heads towards the window. All was quiet and still without. Such like sounds are sometimes heard on the night air, when the living world is at rest: perhaps it was a vagrant gust of wind sobbing from the hill.

Auber resumed the conversation.

“Of course I do; but that does not weaken my argument. Lady Ida! we know very well there is more rigour than fondness there; but if, in your bachelor pursuit of her, you required such mental relaxation as philandering, you

may go farther than flirtation at a future time."

"No, no," Marchmoram replied, sinking his voice deeper; "the tie that thus binds me for ever to my future busy political life, should surely satisfy me. Every year, as I grow older, the fires of youthful passion will fade away before colder habit: I know well enough what marriage is sometimes; and what my marriage with Lady Ida is to be."

Esmé did not mark the bitter zest with which his words were spoken: to her they sounded but exultant throughout. That first astounding declaration, spoken so decidedly, in his own calm, clear voice, paralyzed her. The sudden blow fell upon her with a stunning force that deadened sensation for the moment: it astounded her, not only by its unexpectedness, but by the accidental and unintentional manner of its infliction. The careless ease, cool self-possession, and unconscious indifference of Marchmoram, amazed and confounded her: it was like a momentary glimpse into the future,

where she read her doom. Her faculties were benumbed by the shock of this cruel revelation. She pressed her temples against the cold stone wall, and tried to mutter a prayer for strength to move from the spot.

By the time that Esmé had recovered herself, Marchmoram had nodded good night to Auber, who lounged into his room, leaving the door open. There was perfect stillness: the midnight air was serene and sultry. Marchmoram had risen and stood leaning upon the mantelpiece, his head upon his arms, when suddenly a wailing voice broke the stillness: it was wafted in like a sigh. "Ah! Godfrey, farewell!"

The strong man started and shook with emotion: the sweat stood on his brow. In a moment he rushed forward and sprang from the window out upon the heather: his eye fell upon a white floating figure, vanishing like a wraith over the ridge of the foremost hill that sloped down upon dark Loch Nightach.

Florh was standing near to him in the shadow,

but he saw her not. She had been long standing there, with the bottle of wine, that had been given her half an hour before by a sleepy servant, held under her plaid. But should Jeanie Cameron have died for want of the stimulant she had purposely come for, she would not have stirred until Esmé had moved. She had stood there motionless, watching the wrapt expression of her foster daughter, and scarcely daring to breathe for fear of disturbing her in this eventful hour. When Esmé turned to fly, Florh's outstretched hand had failed in arresting her footsteps as she rushed past.

Marchmoram paced restlessly up and down in the moonlight, and gave vent to the feelings which he had so well concealed from his friend. He spoke audibly.

"Esmé, Esmé, I will—I'll tell thee all: how I have been led on, how I swore revenge, how for years we rivalled each other. I dare not refuse the grasp of life now within my reach. Ambition must first be served: it

has longest reigned—it is the strongest, and I must give up thee. Oh, Esmé! who but you will ever hear, or truly know, the cost of my ambitious marriage, and the strength of the love that it uprooted here!”

Florh had crept quickly away, following Esmé's track, until she came down to the tree on the bank of the loch where the pony had been tied. It was not there; but the marks of its hoofs in the soft ground further on, showed that Esmé had ridden it on towards home.

It was doubly lonesome and eerie, retracing the haunted mossy way back to Jeanie's cottage alone. When Florh reached it, Donald Cameron told her Miss Esmé had arrived some time before, and had stayed a moment with Jeanie, who was now sleeping quietly; she had then put on her plaid and riding skirt, and gone on to Glenbenrough, which she would not take long to reach, the pony seemed so fresh and so anxious to get home.

CHAPTER VIII.

R E T R I B U T I O N .

When grief was calm and hope was dead,
 Late, late in the gloamin Kilmeny came hame;
 And oh! her beauty was fair to see,
 But still and steadfast was her e'e:
 Such beauty bard may never declare,
 For there was neither pride nor passion there.

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The Queen's Wake.

We shall reap of the works we then sow,
 When the stars are dissolved in the sky.

SCOTT.

WE left Esmé flying, as if from an impending fate. She had passed the first dark, dreary part of her road—the bleak morass and scowling leafless hills; and the trance-like state of

her mind was dispelled by the active exercise. She had emerged on the beautiful route from Dreumah, amidst purple-heathered heights ; and the pony's hoofs splashed through the frothing river Rouagh, which crossed the road here in fordable depth, the water sparkling and flashing in the moonlight : she was not far from the clump of weeping birches and honeysuckle covered rocks near Lochandhu, where the spring was.

The night was calm and still ; and its silence was broken only by the hoarse, unceasing cry of the corn craik, echoing from the little far-spread crofts of cultivation, golden with the yellow glow of ripening corn on the sterile hills around. The pony now walked, and the bridle hung loose upon its neck, as Esmé sat upright in the saddle, her figure swaying easily to Suila's measured pace. She looked upward : the sky was clear, and its ethereal blue unclouded : the star-gemmed vault of heaven, vast and impalpable, seemed to her an image of the ocean of eternity. Her countenance was

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unearthly in its clearness, and radiant with a heavenly serenity, like the face of a saint. There was neither pallor nor flush on it: her mind seemed to have shone forth with intensity of feeling, and purged all earthly taint away; her eyes beamed full and clear, with lustre undimmed, untearful. No shade of bitterness, no contraction of distress marred the white and thoughtful brow; but calm, martyr-like resignation gave her an aspect of spirituality. She could not look back on the past: her gaze was upward, her thoughts fixed on the divine source of strength and comfort. Supported by aid from above, Esmé was enabled to rise superior to the turmoil of conflicting emotions.

As Esmé drew near to the Roua Pass, a change came over the sky; the moon, which hung high above Craigchrisht, vanished behind the peaks of higher hills; shadows, so deep as almost to be palpable, succeeded, spreading over the whole face of the earth: Esmé thought of "the darkest hour ere day." Soon the air became heavy and sultry, and summer

lightning flashed fitfully on the horizon, shedding momentary brightness across the path, which the next instant was blackness. She thought of it this time without fear: it appeared very beautiful and seemed to typify the gleams of hope that lightened her dark path.

When near the Roua Pass, and amongst the weeping birches, Esmé alighted. Suila stood quietly cropping the heather, and occasionally snorting a gentle invitation to proceed. Esmé looked up at the heavens, now again star-bespangled where dark clouds had parted; and then, as she would soon reach home, she prepared herself to enter with a strong heart, and, sinking on her knees, she prayed fervently for strength with earnest supplication. Relieved and calmed by her devotion, she remounted; and, as the pony began the ascent of the Roua Pass, her thoughts reverted to Jeanie Cameron, lying penitent on her death-bed. The thought crossed her mind that she would fain change places with that dying girl if she could; but she repelled the despairing

feeling as impious: though a scalding tear fell as a thought of Normal succeeded.

It was dark, for the moon had set, and Esmé tied the bridle to the pommel of the saddle, knowing it was best to leave her pony's footing wholly unassisted. She sat with her hands clasped upon her knee and eyes averted from the shadowy scene around, when a slight sound roused her attention, and she started as a man suddenly rose from the path before her.

His lighted cigar showed her the swarthy features of the Italian Gupini, his white teeth gleaming as, politely saluting her, he laid his hand on the pony. He spoke in a low, rapid tone, and she scarcely knew what he said, except that he hoped to get a bed at Glenbenrough; as he was returning from Lochandhu, where he had found the cottage locked and no one within. He walked by the pony's head, on the side next the precipice, Esmé keeping silence. They were slowly rounding the Pass: another step and they would be on the broad surface of the hill; when a voice shouted from

the height above, sounding almost in their cars, "Dioghaltas!"* It was instantaneously followed by a sharp report, which shook the midnight air. The pony bounded madly forward—gave one wild plunge—and it, Esmé, and the valet, were seen no more!

Glenbenrough was lying awake; he often did so: it is a habit with men who have led very active lives, when they reach his age. He was lying thinking of his three daughters: of his Norah, so happily married; of little Ishbel, growing up the delight of his eyes: and of his bright sunny Esmé, whose youthful promise ripened daily in advancing womanhood. Would the fate of these two dawn bright as Norah's? If so, then would his old age indeed go triply gilded down. These sweet musings were rudely dispelled by the report of a gun or pistol discharged in the direction of the Roua Pass.

It was an unusual sound at that hour, and,

* Revenge.

forgetting it was not yet August, he thought of poachers after the grouse. He sat up and listened; all was utterly still, so he lay down again, and thought whether he should get up or not. His determination yet wavered, when suddenly an awful sound burst upon his ear,—the yell of a human being in agony. The shrieks echoed faster and louder, as, borne on the western breeze, they came nearer to the house. Glenbenrough leaped up and threw the window open; and, though a strong-nerved man, the sweat stood on his brow, so fearful was that shrieking! Ere he had time to slip on his shoes, a step came rushing past upon the gravel, and the next moment Ewen Mackenzie had dashed himself against the sill of the open window.

Never did pale midnight moon look down on mortal face more ghastly with horror,—worn and attenuated with three days' fasting on the hills, the long red hair hanging wildly matted round it, and the grey starting eyes glaring blindingly through blood that streamed from

his temple, which he had struck against some tree or rock in his headlong speed. With a cry of agonized despair, he flung himself almost upon the appalled Glenbenrough, exclaiming,

“Help! help! I have shot her! Your daughter’s down the Roua Pass!”

On what a scene did the morning sun rise, shortly after! On strong-lined faces of speechless men, stalwart and young, tottering and aged, clustered on the Roua Pass; some, with crouching gait, hanging over the edge of the precipice; others, with strong but tremulous grasp, clinging to its slippery jagged sides, as painfully they followed the reckless and perilous descent of a distracted father.

Waving from the topmost bough of a birch hung Esmé’s plaid, suspended there in her headlong fall from the Pass above; further down, almost on the river brink, a dark mass was seen: it was Gupini, stretched on the rock, with his feet in the water and a bullet

through his brain. But, except the plaid, there was no trace of Esmé or of her pony.

The pistol which had been discharged was found upon the Pass, and it was recognized as one of Normal's; the very one that Esmé had polished at Lochandhu on that winter day of Huistan's death: her name scratched by herself upon the stock was visible. It had been kept warm in Ewen's breast for three days past. He had reached the Roua Pass with it only a few hours ere he fired it; having, that Saturday morning, met the Dreumah gillie many miles from there, who told him Mr. Marchmoram was sure to go to Glenbenrough in the course of the evening, or at night.

At last, poor Suila, the Highland pony, which had carried Esmé over, was discovered. Ewen's tame fox, which had joined the search from Lochandhu, was observed seated on the bank opposite, with pointed ears and scenting nose: he was watching a raven that had perched upon the pommel of the saddle, which protruded above the surface of one of the deepest pools

in the river. The pony lay underneath; and it was here the water must be dragged.

Some hours later, Marchmoram and Auber stood with their friends in the warmth before the lodge, whistling to their dogs gambolling on the grass and impatient for the hour to bid them start over the hills to the parish church, when a messenger suddenly brought word that Esmé lay dead at Glenbenrough. Incredulity succeeded to the amazement which the first shock of the dismal tidings produced; but when the messenger solemnly affirmed the truth of what he said, and described the circumstances of Esmé's death, then the contrast of character was strikingly shown in the effect upon the two men. Auber broke forth in exclamations of astonishment and sorrow, questioning the messenger on every particular; while Marchmoram stood motionless with knit brow and downcast eyes, the tears streaming down his sunburnt face.

It was known that Miss Esmé had died last

night, the messenger said, and that she had been killed in mistake for Marchmoram; for the man who had done it was her own foster-brother, who had loved her dearly but had ever hated him. There were wailing, weeping crowds upon the Roua Pass; and he had seen her plaid, taken off the tree, hanging in her father's hand: there were some spots of blood upon it; and the shattered carcase of her pony lay on the turf side by side with the dead body of Gupini. When he left, they were dragging the pool, out of which the pony had been taken, and in which they knew Esmé also had found her cold watery grave.

Marchmoram heard all in silence, and then bounded away from amongst the men gathered there: like a wounded stag, he kept aloof, unseen, alone, upon the hills that day. No one approached him, no mortal eye saw him until he came down at night and went straight into the cell-like solitude of his chamber. There was utter silence in the lodge, Lord Darnton alone being in the sitting-room.

Auber had left to go South some hours before : he was looking ghastly pale and ill : the suddenness of the catastrophe had given a severe shock to his nervous system, and he feared becoming ill at that lonely spot, Dreumah, in the midst of painful and depressing associations. What would become of him there, in a nervous fever, without medical aid and surrounded by friends mourning the loss of one so dear to them ? He must quit the place at once : once in the South, there was no fear ; he would conquer all sad recollections and foolish self-upbraidings, and, by determined self-control, be able, by-and-bye, to class poor Esmé's fate, and his past intimacy with her, among the sadly-pleasing, soothing memories of bye-gone days.

Who shall depict the feelings of the heart-broken father, who sat mute with bowed head and deeply-furrowed face, his sunken eyes, tearless and glazed, watching, from a little distance, the men dragging the pool, from which he expected every moment to emerge

the lifeless form of his drowned child? His clothes hung dusty and torn upon him; and the haggard look of one worn out with distressful excitement and fatigue, showed that nature was well-nigh exhausted.

He sat there, almost stupified with grief: and when Ishbel, who had gone wailing madly up and down the river banks all the morning, flitted wildly past him, he merely bent his head a little lower; but when the next moment he felt a woman's hand laid gently on his shoulder, he could not bear the touch: a nervous thrill of consciousness made him start and throw it off.

It was Florh. Her face was flushed to crimson, and her words came forth in hot hurried gasps. She grasped Ishbel tightly with one hand, as she bent down to speak to Glenbenrough.

“I hae just come here, I hae just come here! And now tell me, oh! laird, how knew you that she fell down there? I see the trail o' that ill-fared lad who perished wi' lies on his

lips an' in his heart. God gave him as the rightfu' victim. An' I hae seen the very broken bush 'gainst which first the pony dashed in its downfa': but for our Esmé, I hae nae found but her shoe no ten feet down the brae."

Glenbenrough looked up vacantly.

"Aye, nought falls to the ground without our God's permission! Laird, my beloved laird," she whispered excitedly, "have hope!"

Glenbenrough, with a wild look, as if suddenly awakened from a trance, was in a moment on his feet; his eyes lit up with eagerness, and he seized her arm.

"Florh, Florh, what is it? speak!"

"Hush, then, hush! I promised to keep it quiet: all this was unkent. Your bairn's safe asleep on my bed at Lochandhu!"

With a deep sigh of relief, the father fell upon his knees and offered up thanks to God for this mercy; and Ishbel, throwing her arms around his neck, mingled her tears of joy with his. Florh stood by and related the circumstances.

“I was coming frae Jeanie Cameron’s death-bed, early in the dawn, when I met our Esmé. At first I thought it was her spirit afore me. Her bonny gouden hair was dabbed wi’ blood—for her head is cut a little—and her white dress looked like the graive claiths: what a’ had happened I could not rightly divine, for her brain seemed a little wandering; but I made it out forbye. At the foot o’ the hill she had met that poor dark-minded lad (oh! to think that his and Jeanie’s souls went forth together to judgment!) and he walked up beside her. Then that shot was fired.” (Here Florh struck her breast.) “Oh, hone! oh, hone a rie! Gupini fell down like a flash, and in the pony’s first wild loup, our Esmé fell off too; but she was stayed,—ye may see noo the very trunk o’ the tree which stopped her fall, and her shoe lying by it yet,—while the pony gave a mad bound further on, ere it went crashing down into the deep water beneath.

“Our Esmé may have lain an hour there;

an' when she came to her senses, the only feeling she had, poor young mindfu' thing, was to save her father and sister from the shock o' her frightsome appearance; and sae, when she had dragged hersel' up, she came slowly on to me. She lies now in quiet, but living sleep; an' I hae gien her the sleeping drops that will keep her sae till night. Ye will no come near her the day, O laird; but to-morrow ye'll baith welcome her home. An' now let me return to her, an' to my ain sad thochts." And Florh wiped her brow as she ceased.

The search for Esmé was now stayed. In a few trembling earnest words of thanks and praise, those unwearied sympathising friends were told by their beloved laird of his daughter's safety; and then, leaning on Ishbel, Glenbenrough took his homeward way rejoicing.

Florh retraced her steps to Lochandhu. She gently opened the door and entered her cottage on tiptoe: it was all dark within, save the light of a smouldering peat fire on the

hearth; and all silent, save low a murmur of breathing from the bed. Florh stood for a time watching Esmé in her deep quiet sleep: the light was just sufficient to show the pallor of her face; for she had lost much blood from the wound on her head. Her foster mother stooped down and kissed her brow, muttering, "Saved, saved!" ere she turned away to her low settle by the fire. And there Florh sat from that mid-day until night; rocking herself to and fro in the darkness, and weeping and moaning over the wilfully blasted fortunes of her ill-governed son: she "neither rose up to eat nor to drink."

When the sun went down she opened the window shutter, and at last Esmé awoke in the gloaming light: but there was silence betwixt her and her foster mother, save that once Esmé faintly said,

"Florh, let me lie here until to-morrow, and then I'll go home."

That return home, and the meeting with her father and sister, may be imagined. As one

rescued from the dead was Esmé welcomed back by them. Holy and happy was their rejoicing: deep and grateful the joy at Glenbenrough.

Esmé was much weakened by her accident, and her nervous system had received a severe shock. She was confined to her room for a time, and the doctor recommended a subsequent change of air and scene: but in the meantime the quieter she was kept the better.

And what of the wretched murderer? Dragged along by his mother's arm, he was hurried, raving and cursing, to the sea shore. With frantic bitterness she goaded him on with Jeanie's dying confession that his friend and confidant, Gupini, had been *his* enemy—*her* seducer. She assured him that, though the Providence which had saved the life of his innocent foster sister had put the rightful victim in his way, yet as he had not known that at the time, he must still ever consider his revenge as denied to him, while yet the bloodguiltiness was on his soul. Had he not

now, by his frowardness, ruined his mother and himself? By his sullen vindictiveness he had brought her old age to sorrow, and heaped ignominy for ever on his name.

Four Highlanders of his clan forced him, against his will, into a boat waiting there; they pushed off and rowed him along the western coast, and out until they reached a rocky island, where a ship, bound for foreign lands, lay harbouring. As the boat went lessening in the distance, with Ewen seated in dogged and gloomy silence, Florh stood upon the rocky beach and, with outstretched hands, waved him off, crying shrilly—her voice heard above the noise of the sea birds—

“Go! go! I never may hear o’ thee more; and thou darest never, never return!”

When they reached the ship, Ewen was put aboard. On a far distant burning shore he was left, to find his own way and live as best he could; or die, if so he chose. He lived: but in Scotland he was never heard of more.

About a week after Esmé's escape, the night before Marchmoram left Dreumah, he came out from the lodge at midnight to take a long walk. His face was as pale, and his eyes burned as restlessly, as on that night when he rode from Thistlebank to Glenbenrough. Outward nature was very similar too: it was a fitful night of alternate bright and gloom; the wind went soughing and moaning through the crazy mountain pines, and the shadows flitted in grim grotesque shapes over the rocky heights, darkly and silently vanishing, exactly as they did on that former night when he went, as now, to visit his sleeping love.

The moon came floating out upon the deep blue heavens, and poured down her silver floods of light full upon the grey old house of Glenbenrough, as Marchmoram reached the heights of the Roua Pass and sat him down full in view of it. He took a crumpled letter from out his breast: it had been chafing and fretting there for the last four days, and was written by Esmé four-and-twenty hours after

her escape. Several times he read it over: he knew it almost by heart. There he sat and gazed on the old familiar house: her window was darkened: all was cold, silent, and still. Thus she had bidden him farewell:—

“I write to bid you good-bye. You will have been sorry to hear of my accident; but, so far as I am concerned, it was well for me.

“It was on that night I heard of your intended marriage. You must well know the shock it gave me, for I heard it cruelly from yourself—how, matters not now: from that night must my life henceforth commence anew. I have prayed God to enable me utterly to forget and forgive you. I never, never wish to see you again on earth; and I never willingly will.

“Sincerely do I hope you may find happiness as well as prosperity in your marriage.

“ESMÉ MAC NEIL.”

After again reading the letter, he tore the

paper into small pieces and scattered them down the Pass, watching the stream float the fragments away.

There he sat alone, brooding in bitterness and grief on the past, and waging war against all earthly ties; devoting himself anew to the master passion—the mocking phantasm of ambition—to whose allurements he had so ruthlessly sacrificed the gentle and guileless girl, who loved him as no other had done.

As the early dawn broke, wild-eyed animals—the fox, the hare, and the roe—came out of the birch-wood coverts and gazed wonderingly upon him, ere they turned to scent or nibble through the dewy heather and glistening grass; the birds began to sing, and the hawks to cry from the giddy heights as they wheeled to and fro in search of prey; and soon the sun's rays, struggling through the mists, shed warmth and brightness over the grand solitude around.

With sealed lips and dark steadfast eyes, Marchmoram retraced his steps, to proceed in

a few hours from Dreumah to England, bearing with him that last sad memory of the Highlands.

For many months Esmé made slow progress towards recovery; but when her father proposed a tour for her, himself, and Ishbel, as the best and most agreeable tonic, she gently resisted, saying she was better in the Highlands: she only required time and quiet there to get well. At last he proposed moving to Arduashien for a time; a wild and secluded place, and where the air was more bracing than at Glenbenrough. Thither Esmé did not object to go; it ever had been as a second home to them all. So, they went, and remained there nearly a year. Esmé and Ishbel were as daughters in the house, and someway under the constant motherly care of Mrs. Mac Alistair, they led healthful and quiet life. Esmé's bloom slowly returned, as the past faded away into the dim realm of forgetfulness, but as yet she seldom smiled.

Norah and her husband were still abroad.

Florh remained at Lochandhu, but went occasionally to Arduashien. She was still sad and restless; and Ishbel would try to get Esmé away when Florh burst forth into one of her wild laments for her son. Yet there were gleams of sunshine cheering her strong heart, for she always spoke of the certainty of her Normal's return; and then in her love for him, she would exclaim that he was left to her as a son: now the nearest and dearest of all.

Normal was still a wanderer abroad, and he did not write very frequently, though Florh sometimes wrote to him. Yet there was a deep and strong sympathy that bound him to his Highland home; and he counted the hours until that time should arrive when he could feel he might return.

At other times a feverish sort of life or hope seemed hanging over Florh: she would say to Esmé,

“Think ye that I would bear up 'gainst my weary wierd as I do, methal gaolach, were

there no a purpose left for me yet in life? No, no, my darling; it's not any hope for mysel'! all that is done: Ewen banished and Huistan dead! Poor old withered Florh, lopped of her branches, is now but a blasted, dying trunk. Even though the bright time come to those she still loves, there will be no transplanting for her: 'where the tree fell, there let it lie.' I'll die in my ain old hame at Lochandhu. But I hae a mission yet to go through wi': a bit travel to take, and a message to gie; an' I am longing it were over before I may die."

She would also sometimes ask Ishbel quietly, if there were no news in the English papers. At last Ishbel said to her one day,

"Florh, I see by this morning's paper that Mr. Marchmoram is to be married on the 29th."

CHAPTER IX.

TIES THAT SEVER AND TIES THAT BIND.

LUATH.—But will ye tell me, Master Caesar,
Sure great folks life's a life o' pleasure?

CÆSAR.—L—d man, were ye but whyles where I am,
The gentles ye wad ne'er envy them;
There's sic parade, sic pomp an' art,
The joy can scarcely reach the heart.

BURNS' *Twa Dogs*.

Speed on, O time! the happy day.

CAMPBELL.

ON the day when the Lady Ida Beauregard accepted Godfrey Marchmoram, the intended marriage of her father with Lady Jane Trevor was publicly announced; and it was supposed

both weddings would come off about the same time. It was from a firm conviction of her father's coming marriage that Lady Ida took that opposing step of safety, and she hurried on the day of her own escape. It was now too late to retract, when she suddenly found, only the night before, that the Duke had quarrelled with his intended bride, that the match was broken off, and that he had foresworn from that day all further acquaintance with the Lady Jane Trevor.

This unexpected turn of events strangely affected Lady Ida. She, being blinded by passion, had entirely overlooked the possibility of the match being broken off; a want of foresight that lowered for ever her own estimation of her skill in social diplomacy.

Could she have foreseen that the Duke would have acted thus, she never would have married Godfrey Marchmoram; for the idea of marriage was to her hateful and repugnant: she rebelled against the tie. Her interest in Marchmoram had ever been strong; but she would fain have kept him to her chariot wheels,

and enjoyed the triumph of seeing him there : never, never would she have permitted him to share the seat with her ; much less to direct its course. She now yielded to what seemed bitter necessity. It was too late to draw back : she would be compromised, humiliated, were she to do so ; for she would be regarded as rejected.

The wedding-day arrived ; a brilliant throng of rank and fashion witnessed the sacred rite which joined two proud, ambitious, and rebellious natures in a bond that both loathed, and would fain have evaded, but dare not. With serene, smiling fortitude, these two lofty and strong spirits bowed themselves to the matrimonial yoke, compelled by false shame and worldly interest. Unholy to them were the solemn vows, that were belied even in the act of taking ; unblessed the union of these two beings, whose hearts revolted from each other now as they had never done before, and whose souls more than ever dwelt apart.

The honeymoon was to be passed at Mr.

Marchmoram's country seat, about thirty miles from London. On the morning after the wedding and the arrival there of the "happy couple," Marchmoram sat alone at breakfast: Lady Ida had not made her appearance yet, and would not, perhaps, for some hours. He sat at a table luxuriously spread, but his appetite seemed cloyed, and he was evidently in one of his absent moods. A powdered footman had addressed him twice ere he turned round to ask, rather sharply, what the man wanted. The reply was strange: a peasant woman, peculiarly dressed, who said she was from the Highlands of Scotland, was most troublesomely anxious to see him: her name was Florh Mackenzie.

Marchmoram desired the man to show her up, and then he rose from his seat. His cheek flushed, and a rush of ideas passed through his brain. Had Esmé sent a message to him through her foster mother? Was there any dying call to Glenbenrough? He drank hastily a glass of water, as the door was thrown open

and he heard the firm step of the Highland woman advancing.

Florh wore her Highland clanking brogues, and her shepherd plaid was thrown over her shoulders and head. As the footman ushered her in he put a pocket-handkerchief to his nose: the peaty smoke flavour from Florh's plaid was too strong for his delicate senses; but to Marchmoram it came as perfume fresh from the hills, and carried his memory instantaneously back to the Highlands.

Florh looked much older than when she had last courtesied to him in the entrance hall of Glenbenrough; her hair had turned grey, and the lines on her face were marked stronger by grief and care. As Marchmoram with bland voice accosted her, and offered her a chair, she drew herself stiffly up, and replied in quick accent, "Aneil."*

She slowly surveyed the splendid room (would it not be a picture to take back?) and observed

* No.

all the magnificence and wealth displayed in the furniture and ornaments. Between the centre windows, hung with rich draperies of purple and gold, was a portrait, painted in oils, of Lady Ida, in her drawing-room train and plumes, and with a colour on the cheek which was wanting in the original. Florh turned her keen grey eyes alternately from this picture to the bridegroom before her.

Mr. Marchmoram did not sit down, but he spoke courteously.

"I hope all the family of Glenbenrough are well."

"Yes, sir; they are weel."

"Are they all at home at present?"

"No, sir: that bad accident sent them away for a time to a healthier place."

"Ah! I hope there have been no lasting bad effects," Marchmoram said, his lip twitching a little.

"No, sir; Miss Esmé is nigh as strong and weel as ever."

Then, with a wonderful look of self-posses-

sion, and an indescribable tone of concentration, Florh looked steadily at him and said,

“Mr. Marchmoram, I hae come up frae Lochandhu, a long gait—but I hae thought little of it—just to hae this word wi’ you. Ye were very intimate at Glenbenrough; perhaps for that sake you’ll hear it frae me noo?”

He bowed, and grasped firmly the back of the chair: she went on.

“Ye ken how that Italian lad was shot on the Roua Pass by my Ewen, in a mistake for you. He had made my Ewen believe that it was you wha had ruined the lassie, Jeanie Cameron; and he had contrived to deceive mysel’ as weel as Ewen in that, Mr. Marchmoram. Weel, this Italian lad was very intimate wi’ me: he had made himsel’ nigh as a son to me; for he was clever, he was deep, and he was restless minded. He needed aye to hae the occupation baith o’ love and o’ friendship, and he succeeded in playing the first wi’ my Ewen’s lassie, and in gieing the last to me. He had few secrets frae me; and lat-

terly I contrived to read some that he did na quite wish to gie up to me. He had had a strange wild life o' it altogether, and mony a strange dark adventure

"I want now just to tell one little bit o' his life to ye. Hae patience, hae patience, for ye'll find out most wondrously at the end how it affects ye: listen quietly, Mr. March-moram, to every word o' it.

"Nigh ten years ago now, Gupini was in England travelling with a group of strolling play actors. He was an Italian gentleman's son, I believe; an' he had gude blood in his veins, an' he had gude education too, an' he lo'ed poetry. But he oft told me how deevilry was naturally born in him, and how he had rin away, when a mere bairn, frae strict guardians, and how he always pleased himself gaily through the world. Weel, he was acting through the country when fate drew him an' the rest to an English 'toun,'* near which

* Village.

there was a grand old castle; an' twa young girls lieved in it nearly their lane: the ane was a humble friend to the other.

That was a grand simmer place: there was a park, with avenues of oak, and grassy glades, and rich flower gardens, and quiet, slow, rinning waters. Gupini easily climbed the high walls of the deer park, an' he met the twa young girls. He had a friend, a wild English lad, an' he foregathered with the one that was no a lady; an' Gupini got the other to listen to him, while he taught her Italian poetry. They talked o' love under the simmer moonlight nights, an' they rambled through green woods without, an' through long deserted rooms an' wings of the grand old hoose within. I need na stop to explain to ye that which is nature. Was there never an untaught lassie glamoured? an' has na a man's passionate eye, afore this, won return frae the highest lady in the land?

“One night the girls were missing: and who went in pursuit, but an old frail loving

nurse—a woman older than me, but as fond o’ her bairn as I now prove mysel’ to be o’ mine; and she haled back Gupini’s ane. The other was nearer to her in blood, but she strove no for her as she did for this ane: she let her go, but she got this ane back. She had been a week away.

“Gupini left the country: not for bribe or threat, but he just went away himsel’. And later, when he returned, he was ever fearful o’ meeting her (equally with herself, I suppose); for he had a notion that she had such high friends, an’ was so high hersel’ that they would put him out o’ the way for fear o’ the old time coming oot.

“He never forgot that time in his heart, though; an’ he never parted with some bonny tokens, an’ a loving childish letter, that he had got frae her.” Here Florh fumbled with her hand under the folds of her plaid as she spoke. “One or two he did gie to Jeanie Cameron: I got them frae her; but these two I took mysel’ from off his dead body. Will I show them to ye?”

The expression of Marchmoram's face had been latterly startling: a stony stare was in the eye, and his lip quivered now and then convulsively. More terrible was his suspense than poor Esmé's that night at Dreumah Lodge.

"Oh! what a high-born, high-titled lady ye hae got! Ye hae made a high marriage and taken the highest branch on the tree. But, Mr. Marchmoram" (here Florh burst into a loud discordant laugh), "I must show it ye rotten and black to the core, crumbling into ashes in the hand o' the poor lone Highland wife. Look here! On my veritable conscience, I believe that Gupini, the Italian valet, seducer o' Jeanie Cameron, travelling play actor, was also the early an' secret love o' the Lady Ida Beauregard, your present prood, spotless bride."

And she threw upon the table a small glittering locket, with the name of Ida engraved on it, and an old letter folded square and worn at the edges with handling.

Marchmoram's look was fearful: with kindling eyes, lips compressed, clenching the arm of

his chair, for a moment he stood dumb, fiercely glaring on her; but at last, with almost a yell, he exclaimed,

“Devil! witch! it’s a damnable lie!”

She bent forward her face, and, with an expression in it like the sly cruelty of the fox, she said,

“Prove it! Read yon letter; compare the fine hair in the locket; and then look in your bonny leddy’s face when ye ask her if she still minds Carlo Gupini!” Then, with shrieking fury, she shrilly mocked and twitted him in her wild, keen flow of broken English. “Ye suld come back to Glenbenrough, Mr. Marchmoram. It’s true ye’re going to Italy, and the Lady Ida will hae plenty to think on there o’ her first meeting wi’ the Italian ’mong the oaks and dells o’ England. But tak her back to Glenbenrough, an’ let her haud the rightsome wake o’er her first love’s unwept grave! She may there gae out nightly to greet o’er his lonely burial-place.”

He rushed forward, swept the tokens from

the table, and treading them under foot, stamped them into pieces; grinding his teeth as he did so :

“ Begone ! ” he fiercely said.

“ Aye, I’ll go,” Florh replied, retreating slowly backwards. “ I now hae done my duty; which was to show ye your true choice. My fair rejected lily but droops her head awhile; she’ll yet hold it up erect as ever, and as lovely. Your stately fox-glove is poisonous in the heart : it was blighted ere you took it.”

He seized her roughly by the arm, and dragged her forcibly back a step. Pride and rage trembled for mastery in his face.

“ Woman, tell me what bribe will secure your silence ! ”

“ None,” she replied, with a look of withering scorn. “ What use hae I o’ your siller ? I’ll speak nae mair than yon dead man will. Ye hae nae married my bairn, an’ your disgrace signifies noo nae mair to me than your happiness would. I hae nae mair on earth to do wi’ ye. Live, and be prood o’ ye’re leddy.”

And she quitted the room, as Marchmoram, with a groan, sank into his seat.

Lady Ida had dreaded the marriage tie; time, however, pleasantly undeceived her: she could scarce have believed the solemn ceremony might so easily betoken but the outward bond of mere social *convenance*; exemplifying that state of connubiality which she had so oft theorised to her own desire.

Marchmoram offered none of the affectionate demonstration which she had so dreaded; and he neither interfered, nor dictated, nor sought to intermingle in her amusements; nor endeavoured to alter the bias of her views where they differed from his. The reins were left wholly to her: she went on her way, and he went his.

As years wore on, his hair became slightly silvered, and the lines of his face grew deeper as his rising talent became more marked. His ambition had known no check; but it had cooled

since its early aspirations. His character hardened daily. That gorgeous picture he had painted to Esmé, standing on the hill of Craig-chrisht, was realised: crowds of people sung his praises or sought his patronage, and noblemen of old titles bowed to him, and offered the incense of intellectual worship when he rose to address his fellow men.

But this satisfied not. Besides disappointments, mortifications, distrusters—one bitter, hateful secret haunted him ever on wakeful nights. All success seemed hollow and fruitless: his life was joyless. He never returned to the Highlands.

How dreary, as age advanced, to feel there beat not a human pulse quickening its throb to his. There was no soul sympathising with him; no gentle human tie bound him to life; no sweet companion to brighten the last days with exquisite human lovingness; no child to hand down his name to posterity, and cheer his heart with present love and future hope.

As years advanced, Lady Ida shrunk into

a thin and stately observer of *convenances*: she seemed frozen into a formal propriety. In social intimacy there was more restraint betwixt them than frequently exists between mere acquaintance: there was no mutual sympathy. Nothing was left to Marchmoram but that earthly ambition, whose dictates he now must needs follow to the end.

Auber had not been undeceived as to the report of Esmé's tragical fate, until some days after his arrival in London; by which time his nerves had almost recovered the shock of the false intelligence. He became aware, later, that his theory of Platonic love was impracticable in this case; and he never returned to the neighbourhood of Glenbenrough, though he shot in other parts of the Highlands. He spent some pleasant years after his last season so suddenly terminated at Dreumah. There was, however, a threatening shadow on his path, and a baleful influence pursued, and at

last overtook him: like the plague, it came when least expected.

When the crafty Gupini had assured Auber, years before, of the death of Lucia, he had deceived him. Finding the custody of Lucia harassing, and that the gloom of her presence darkened his careless jollity, the valet had let her go, and swore to having ascertained her death. The deceit was however, exposed: at a time when Auber's strength was prostrated by illness, she returned, and ever afterwards clung with leech-like tenacity to her prey.

Auber never could succeed in throwing off that Italian mistress: he evaded her again and again; but she still followed, and forced him, loathing, to return. At night those faded, yet gleaming eyes, with dark rings around them, fell on his each time he oped them; and the sick man turned, shuddering, from them. Her watchfulness was like that of a jailor; her care and tenderness those of a spy. Often in his dreams would he see a glassy Highland loch, fringed by green weeping birches; and

enamelled with water-lilies, breathe the heather-scented air, and look upon a fair sweet face and bright blue eyes gazing with innocent frankness upon him: ere he could enjoy the purity, freshness, youthful health, and artless love, with a start he awoke to a hated reality. Life had become wearisome, companionship distasteful.

Had Lady Ida Marchmoram accompanied her husband in any of his visits to his friend Auber, a fearful welcome might have awaited her: she would likely have encountered in Lucia her quondam companion and friend, the gipsy, Bella Norris.

Glenbenrough had erected an obelisk of white marble at the base of the Roua Pass, in commemoration of his daughter's escape. It pointed to the closed-up, grey old house, and through the tender green sprigs of the budding birches, the snow-white marble gleamed coldly; save when the slant rays of the sun

at morning or evening lighted it up with golden glow, or shadows from the hill fell purpling o'er it.

Glenbenrough had long delayed returning to his home, on account of a protracted paleness and languor affecting Esmé, and attributed to the shock of her severe accident; but there was one who, during all this time, almost daily revisited the deserted house.

On moonlight nights in summer, and in the fierce blasts of winter, might the figure of Florh, wrapped in her shepherd's tartan plaid, have been seen toiling up the ascent, with bowed head and lagging step. She would oft-times stand, with outstretched arms, her grey gleaming eyes seeking restlessly over the quiet house and silent landscape, and cry aloud,

“Ewen left his mother and his country for aye; but, oh! ere my days are spent, return, my ither dearer bairns—return, return!”

Poor Florh clung with the force of her strong nature to the ties and hopes still left. The foster mother's love was sufficient; though

all maternal ambition was extinct, and her schemes had all been baffled: but even to her the time of consolation came at last.

It was in the autumn, after a visit to Norah's happy English home — whither they had gone purposely to welcome a little Yorkshire grandson — that Glenbenrough and his daughters returned home. Esmé now appeared quite restored to her pristine health, bloom, and strength. The shadow that had overcast her youthful spirit was but transient, and the returning sunshine appeared the more beautiful in its serenity. Out of this fiery trial of her passions, Esmé had come forth purified and strengthened. Calmly she now looked back upon her intercourse with Marchmoram as to a dream of fleeting and fallacious delight. She had awakened now: she saw clearly, and returned to the fresh life and quiet sunshine of home-happiness with renovated feelings, and a mind instructed by experience.

Her accustomed duties were again revived; former habits and the old associations again held sway. Nor was it strange that one should be connected with them whose steadfastness had helped to support her, and with whom a sympathy ever had existed, even when striven against. In seeking to obliterate all traces of her misplaced passion, the manly virtues exemplified in Normal had always presented themselves to her mind: she could not think of the past without associations of him; and always in contrast with those she would banish,—painful, yet pleasurable too. His early unwavering love, so true and deep, yet to the last unavowed; and that noblest point of unselfishness which the letter evidenced, had come, heralding, as it were, the desertion of Marchmoram. If Normal were to return, she would show him that she had learned to prize his regard, and they would ever be friends again.

And how was it with Normal? Time had been working well for him too. His first feelings, on hearing of Marchmoram's marriage

and Esmé's consequent freedom, had been wild joy and a craving to return home; but those passed, and graver thoughts succeeded. Why Marchmoram had not married Esmé, he did not then know; but he felt that, when he had left, in jealous dread of that result, he had been himself unworthy of her. He looked back upon his days of boyish sullenness and reserve and churlish pride; he reflected how narrow had been his views, and how untried and ill-disciplined he was. If ever he returned, it must be as a man, and with different ideas and feelings; and under the influence of revived hopes of gaining Esmé's affections, the finer qualities of his nature developed themselves and broke through the crust of hardness and reserve.

It was one sultry evening in the autumn that Esmé strolled to her spring. She had found that, during her absence, the cranberry branches had trailed over the ledge and sha-

dowed the water, so that it was necessary to prune them; and when she had done so, she still continued kneeling there, singing quietly that little Gaelic water song,

“Foam, foam, foam, Essain.”

Presently she stopped and sighed.

What was it that sent a flush, deep as the red cranberry, mantling her cheeks and brow, as, the next instant, startled, she looked upwards? It was an echo of the refrain—a sigh breathed back. There, beside the holly tree, with tearful eyes lovingly, earnestly fixed upon her, Normal stood: his face, though sun-burnt, had paled with emotion, and his hazel eyes looked darker than when last they had met. He stood, seemingly waiting to know what kind of greeting awaited him; as if he feared to have his warm feelings chilled by a cold reception. After a momentary pause, Esmé bounded forward to meet him, extending her hands, with a cordial smile and an exclamation of delight.

“ Oh ! Normal, Normal ! dear Normal ! ”

And as he caught her in his arms, he replied,

“ Oh ! Esmé darling, what a welcome is this ! ”

It was some time later, when Esmé and Normal sought the house ; where he received the surprise and joyous greetings of Glenbenrough and Ishbel : the early harvest moon had eclipsed the fading glories of sunset ere they had thought of returning. They rested in a little grassy nook near the spring, shut in with holly and honeysuckle, whence the view embraced the bends of the river for miles ; and there they sat a long time together, enjoying pleasant communion as in past innocent days. And as Normal told of his long sojourn abroad, and Esmé questioned him on his weary illness, he held her hand in his, and she did not withdraw it.

Now again there were very happy days at Glenbenrough ; and the intercourse of Normal there was uninterrupted. Ishbel declared him

improved in mind and manner and in personal beauty: she said he surpassed, in manliness and intelligence, any Highlander or Englishman she ever had known (Harold perhaps excepted, whom she most admired and loved). And Esmé silently thought how much improved he was: he looked matured and thoughtful. Though grave, there was a gentle, earnest lovingness about him; and he had become sensible and intellectual, as he had formerly been only brave and moody.

Esmé noted that he kept a quiet, careful watch over her: he seemed to study her every wish, and at the same time he showed a guiding firmness that precluded any weak indulgence of idle fancies. Normal's character always had been strong; but it was now a truly fine one. Experience of life, the active exertion of travel, and contact with men, had drawn forth and ripened all the good hidden seed of his moral nature, while they expanded his intellectual powers.

His companionship was delightful to Esmé.

With heart and hand they pursued together the healthy occupations of Highland life ; and with heart and mind they at last sympathized with each other.

The lessons of the past had corrected the faults of both ; their trials had refined, expanded, and elevated two sterling and generous natures, as trials ennoble all such ; and in the genial warmth of revived sympathies and re-kindled feelings of affection, the germs of all good qualities in each unfolded and sprung up, fructifying, in due time, in virtuous and happy lives.

What need to record the union of Esmé and Normal ? Suffice it to say, that Florh lived to see a happy group before the house at Glenbenrough : a tall old man but slightly bent, the glance of his blue eye bright and genial as ever ; a stalwart handsome young man in his native Highland garb ; a strong-built, stately Englishman, with two fair women close to them, and a dark-eyed, bright-faced girl seated beneath ; all enjoying the summer

evening, and listening to the singing of the birds and the sweet ringing voices of little Norahs and Esmés, disporting within sight of the heathery Roua Pass.

Esmé and Normal, Norah and Harold, were happy in their marriages, as only in that state men and women can be who are united with congenial natures by the loving ties that bind. And Ishbel, grown tall and womanly, would probably some day make a like happy choice. Miss Christy would stop, in her gaunt gambols with the children, to breathlessly exclaim,

“Hech, hech, Miss Ishbel! ye must mak’ haste, afore I’ll be too stiff to rampage wi’ ye’re bonny bairns!”

During the life of Glenbenrough, Esmé and Normal lived in the old home with him; and, at his death, he bequeathed the property to Normal: who he thought, being a Highlander, would best carry out the customs of olden

times, and sustain the character of the chieftain.

This was true : but Normal's son might not, perhaps, sustain it any better than Harold's would ; for the march of modern improvement advances fast in the Highlands. Wheat is uprooting the heather. There are Highland lairds who speak with foreign accents, now-a-days ; and native-born Highland ladies who know not the names of the surrounding hills, and never attempt the climbing of them. Year by year the Highlanders are becoming more civilized, and more rapidly approaching to an equality, in manners, education and habits of life, with the rest of the world.

Even since this story was begun, have a few more of the remaining links in the good old-fashioned chain of custom snapped asunder and fallen aside ; but silken bands of suavity, entwined by graceful hands, will serve to bind strong arms and brave hearts, when the aim of each one is the common good of all. Time-honoured usages are dear to us for their asso-

ciations with the past; and all that is good in their spirit may be revived, with fresh vigour and activity, in the improvements of an altered state of society. Nature can never lose its charms for those who delight to study them.

And to such I may say that the only matter-of-fact truth in this book is the scenery: I have visited every hill and glen, each loch and stream, herein described.

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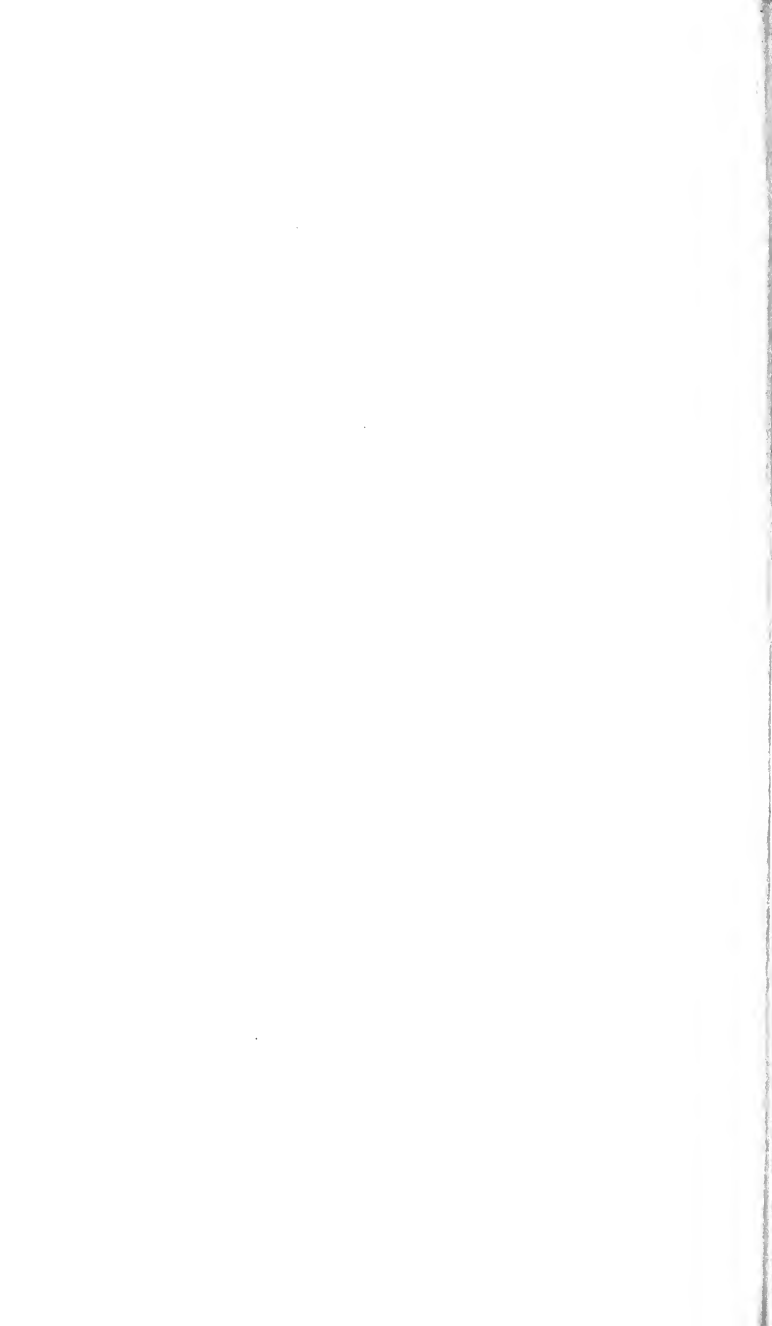
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